

THE
LIGHT OF FAITH



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THE LIGHT OF FAITH

An Outline of
Religious Thought for Laymen

By ALBERT W. PALMER

*President of The Chicago Theological Seminary, and Professor
of Practical Theology in the Federated Theological
Faculty of the University of Chicago*

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DEDICATION

Over sixty years ago one might have seen a girl in her teens and a little boy of four or five sitting on a bench on the bluff above the ocean at Santa Monica in California, waiting for their father to return from the city on the evening train. And as they waited, the girl read Bible stories to the little boy and tried to answer his questions about God and Jesus and life and death. To that sister, still living and still loving her Bible, that little boy, grown to manhood and with graying hair, now dedicates this book as an expression of their common Christian faith.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

It is hoped that this little book may find other uses beyond a casual reading by professional religious book reviewers. While the author hopes for the best from these rather technical specialists, he has not written for them but for the common man—an intelligent thoughtful man, to be sure, and deeply troubled about religion in his thinking, but still a common man who wants things stated frankly and forthrightly in language anybody can understand.

To this end it is hoped this book will find its way to the reading tables of many Christian homes, be the center of small discussion groups in men's classes and women's guilds, and even be commended to people outside the church who, nevertheless, are bothered by the problems here analyzed and evaluated.

In some cases pastors may want to circulate the book among their laymen or young people preparatory to religious study classes during the advent or lenten seasons. Total agreement and rubber-stamp approval are neither to be expected nor to be desired. Let the book, rather, serve as a stimulus and challenge to many a person to write out his own personal creed, and thus clarify and formulate what he himself feels is really important in the realm of religious thought.

PREFACE

This is a book for laymen. It represents the author's free and unfettered religious convictions without any silent reservations, hidden inhibitions or outside control! The book comes without the blessing or "nihil obstat" of any ecclesiastical censorship. The author is a member of a Congregational Christian church but that denomination, by its most cherished traditions, imposes no creedal tests upon its membership. He has been a student in Yale Divinity School, has taught at Pacific School of Religion and for over fifteen years has been president of the Chicago Theological Seminary, but none of these institutions should necessarily be held responsible for his ideas, though he, himself, is grateful for their intellectual stimulus and spiritual inspiration.

After over forty years as an ordained minister, I have gathered in this book the clearest statement I know how to make of the religious truths by which I believe a man can live. During those forty years I have read many books, talked with many people, faced many life situations, meditated as deeply as I could, waited patiently for inner light and prayed for divine guidance. Here is where I have come out. No one has to agree with me, but here, without fear or favor, is what I believe is true.

I have tried to put it all in language so free from the jargon of the schools, or even of the pulpit, that any layman can understand it at a glance. I have had in mind particularly the thoughtful layman, whether self-educated or a

college graduate, who has found certain conventional religious formulas and assumptions distasteful and some parts of the Bible confusing. I have tried to sit in his chariot, as Philip did of old with a certain Ethiopian business man, and interpret to him constructively what religion may really mean to a free and unfettered mind and what it can do to help one's soul in these dark and dangerous days.

ALBERT W. PALMER

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INTRODUCTION

DARK AND DANGEROUS DAYS

These are dark and dangerous days. Confronted with danger, some people dissolve into panic, some retreat into dissipation or pious irrelevancy, some just fight back blindly. But there is a better way, and that is to reorganize one's life on a nobler pattern and think things through on a higher level. If a man's religion can help him do this, it will throw a beam of light even on a dark tomorrow. And a well-worn Chinese proverb says: "It is better to light a candle in the darkness than just to curse the darkness!" This book seeks to be such a candle.

This is not a "war book." While it is written under the shadow of war, and faces certain problems which war, like a star-shell, illuminates in full intensity, its focus is more on the post-war world than on the war. What is ordinarily called "the war," that is the shooting and the military activity, seems at this writing to be entering its final phase and may soon be over. But the dangerous days will not be over! As D. Elton Trueblood has so well said in his *Predicament of Humanity*:¹

Our greatest danger is not from Germany, great as this has been, but rather from the same mood that gripped Germany so powerfully and so destructively. . . . The danger will be enormous when the fighting ends. A host of new problems will arise bringing new temptations. We must remember that, after the First World War, the epidemic (of totalitarian secularism)

broke out first in Italy and then in Germany because these patients were weaker. The germs are everywhere, and we shall be weaker later. . . . What is going to buttress our spiritual life in this time of unparalleled danger, when the ancient supports are gone? What are the modern equivalents of the philosophies of the ancient world and the Christian faith of our fathers?

After the shooting war has stopped, the economic and psychological war may still go on, and seeds may thus be sown for future wars. Moreover, in the revulsion and weariness which follow the high tension of military struggle, new dangers will arise, more subtle but not less menacing than the more obvious ones of embattled days and bomb-shattered nights.

So, whether men call it war or peace, it's a dark and dangerous era in which our lives are cast. These days are dangerous for nations: what nation has not been shaken to its foundations, compelled to give up some of its most deeply cherished liberties and safe-guards, and exposed either to conquest and oppression from without or to turmoil and disintegration from within? If you were a German, Japanese, Italian, Finn or Pole, with how much equanimity would you view your country's future? But what of the strains and stresses that have rocked Britain and America, to say nothing of China and France, or neutrals like Spain or Switzerland? We are sometimes told that war is futile. And that may be true in the sense that war seldom accomplishes its ostensible aims. But it would be very dangerous to assume that war is impotent. It is like a robot bomb which may not reach any well-conceived objective but which, nevertheless, where it does explode will utterly ruin some houses and crack the foundations of others, kill some people and leave others blind or maimed or shell-shocked, though still alive.

These are dangerous days for races. It is true that some races have made progress during the war toward better treatment. We have repealed our Chinese exclusion law, and Negroes have made some headway toward fairer acceptance in Army and Navy and in politics. But these gains are counter-balanced by our tragic mistreatment of our American citizens of Japanese ancestry² and by the slowly rising tide of anti-Semitism. No one who knows the racial situation at first-hand can fail to sense the deepening tensions and ominous resentments which emerge out of the turmoil of war-time with its violence and hatred. Bad treatment is bad enough, but bitterness over bad treatment is worse, and despair of ever attaining justice by normal peaceful development is most dangerous of all. It leads to riot, violence, more deeply rooted prejudices and more inexorable hatreds. And who will not say that is the way the winds are blowing to-day?

How dangerous these days are for social institutions I leave you all to judge. What is happening to the home, to public education, to the college, to private industry, especially to the small producer, to agriculture and to politics, each man can judge from his own post of observation. What I am particularly concerned about is the danger this age brings to the Christian Church—and the Jewish synagogue as well. There are some signs of hope. The spirit of church union is growing. The chaplain apparently has functioned in the armed forces with an acceptance and a devotion to duty which are very reassuring. There has been a certain concern and wistfulness abroad in the public mind, and even an exploitation of religion, as shown by the publicity accorded the Eddie Rickenbacker stories, and others, less heroic and more colored by superstition, which, nevertheless, demonstrate a significant popular regard for religion.

But, over against all such surface indications, we may well note these sober and challenging words of Dr. Trueblood: ³

The terrible danger of our time consists in the fact that ours is a *cut-flower civilization*. Beautiful as cut flowers may be, and much as we may use our ingenuity to keep them looking fresh for a while, they will eventually die, and they die because they are severed from their sustaining roots. We are trying to maintain the dignity of the individual apart from the deep faith that every man is made in God's image and is therefore precious in God's eyes. . . . What men need is some contact with the real world in which moral values are centered in the nature of things. . . . The only sure way in which we can transcend our human relativities is by obedience to the absolute and eternal God.

The plain fact is that there has been, and is, no deep revival of religion. No inspired preachers, no dynamic movement, no vital wave of conviction and concern in the field of religion have yet arisen to lead us forward. The church seems either bogged down in an easy-going secularism or driven back into a retreat toward theological language and doctrinal formulas which were outgrown long ago and which, when polished up and presented today, are either meaningless or promptly repudiated by modern men who must inevitably view the universe in the full light of the methods and achievements of modern science. What is desperately needed is a gospel which presents eternal and verifiable truth in language and thought forms currently meaningful and really authoritative to contemporary thinking.

Perhaps the greatest danger of all, therefore, is the peril that the Christian faith itself may lose its appeal and power. A cynical and pessimistic generation might arise which would fail to see the validity of religion and its relevance to

life. There is, also, a current cult of tragedy which scorns the essential underlying optimism of Jesus and the courage of early Christianity as mere superficial Pollyanna liberalism. In this connection it may be well to meditate on E. M. Foster's penetrating observation: "The tragic view of the universe can be noble and elevating, but it is a dangerous guide to daily conduct and it may harden into stupid barbarism, which smashes at problems instead of disentangling them." What the world needs today is not despair, nor fatalism nor any kind of hope-renouncing pessimism, but a Faith—a Faith with authentic roots deep in the past, to be sure, but a Faith which lives in today as well as in the past and speaks a language which our own age can understand and welcome with enthusiasm.

But this faith, which can put iron into our blood and spiritual vitamins into our emotional vitality, must be stated in terms which laymen can understand and accept. Its technical formulation in terms of philosophy and theology is basic and essential, but there is also need for someone to translate what is most liveable and heroic in modern religious thought into everyday language which he who runs, or rides in a jeep or a day-coach, may read and understand. To do that is what this book has undertaken. It is a theology for laymen. It seeks to state in direct and normal human language, free from all technical jargon or professional shorthand, the fundamental truths of a modern Christian faith capable not only of surviving in the modern world but of illuminating it! Religion needs to be courageous and aggressive, not apologetic. We are called upon not to retreat into the sixteenth century but to go forward in the twentieth. We have a faith that can save the world—and the world desperately needs salvation.

The Light of Faith

Our knowledge is a torch of smoky pine
That lights the pathway but one step ahead
Across a void of mystery and dread.
Bid, then, the tender light of faith to shine
By which alone the mortal heart is led
Unto the thinking of the thought divine.⁴

CHAPTER I

THE GOD OF TOMORROW

Someone, reading this chapter head, may say a little scornfully: "The God of Tomorrow? God does not change—he is eternally the same, yesterday, today and forever!" Which is true enough. But our ideas about God change, and our lives are deeply influenced not only by what God is but by what we think he is. If there is to be any light in tomorrow's world, it cannot come from a darkened vision of God.

"I no longer believe in God!" The man said it pontifically and impressively to Don Beatty, a chaplain friend of mine. Wisely, Don did not reply with a barrage of arguments but with a question: "Why?" The man told him why. But Don, being a skilled counsellor, only plied him with more questions: "How did you get this way? How long have you been thinking along these lines? What started you off in that direction?" When the man had completely uttered himself on his complaint against God, Don said, to his great surprise, not "You are utterly wrong," not "You are a terrible heretic," but simply: "Well, the only trouble with you is that you are twenty years behind the times! I gave up believing in that kind of God twenty years ago!"

It has been written: "When the false gods go, the gods arrive." That isn't necessarily so—the demons may arrive first, unless we are careful! But, in any case, the false gods must go, for modern man's religious thinking is often blocked at the very start by false conceptions of God.

There is, for instance, the absentee god who sits remote in heaven disregarding of the world except upon rare occasions when he comes down and breaks through the operations of natural law by working a miracle. And there is the glorified policeman god who delights in an opportunity to punish bad little men for going fishing on Sunday or using his name disrespectfully. And there is the cruel and terrible tribal god who approved Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter in order to fulfill a foolish vow,¹ and who, with unspeakable cruelty, made Abraham prepare to offer up his little boy as a human sacrifice.² And there is the grim god of conventional orthodoxy and modern fundamentalism who cascades into a hell of endless torment the souls of all poor human beings who fail to accept the right theological dogmas in time or who have the bad luck not to be predestined to salvation. (This latter class once included even the poor little "non-elect infants," though mercifully, or as an added twist of torture's thumbscrew, I don't quite know which, no one knew just which infants were elect and which were non-elect!) No wonder some people have found it hard to believe in God when he has been so terribly caricatured and misrepresented!

And, of course, there are other false gods, though not so labeled, much more contemporaneous and potent for modern men, such as money, pride, self-indulgence, family, race and nationalistic ambition and arrogance. All these things may have for men some of the values of God insofar as they are regarded as worthy of supreme loyalty and are given uncritical obedience. Even a man's atheism may become a kind of god for him. The trouble with such gods is that they are either bad or inadequate objects for our utmost affection and obedience. They are "baubles we buy with a whole soul's tasking." But, insofar as we give them dominance and

control over us, we have installed them as god—false gods though they be.

Some men think that they are atheists because they no longer believe in the early Hebrew god depicted in parts of the Old Testament or in the god of sixteenth century theology. Having ceased to fear any action by an absentee deity in the clouds, they assume that they are emancipated from religion; and yet all the while they are really bowing down and burning incense to these false gods of money, pride or self-indulgence, family, race or nationalism. Other men, while admitting theoretically that there may be a God hid somewhere in the clouds, as they naively believed in childhood, have seen no evidence of his activity of late and feel that they are left to their own self-direction and can probably get by, doing as they please. They are not quite happy about this, for a residual and half-unconscious dread lest God might turn up after all and punish them lurks in the background of their consciences and troubles what little theological thinking they cannot avoid doing from time to time, especially when things go wrong.

All this results in self-centered little lives either clouded with partly suppressed fears or deadened by reckless dissipation or inadequately reassured in some cases by superstitious practices,—and, in others, by a materialistic philosophy which regards the universe as a vast machine without meaning or morality. In this vast whirl of atoms, such a philosophy tells them, chance rules and man alone has consciousness and is deceived by moral standards which, in reality, are only more or less convenient behavior patterns without any permanent validity. Indeed, this kind of crass materialism, which classifies the universe as a vast meaningless machine, grinding on forever but without any spiritual values, may be the most deadly false god of all. Such a

philosophy of life, if whole-heartedly accepted and consistently adhered to, would lead to either one or the other of two conclusions: either that man's ideas about truth, beauty and goodness are a freakish and meaningless accidental development in the universe, to be cherished for themselves alone but without any further significance; or else that these things, being without validity in the total meaning of things, should be disregarded or even crushed if they get in the way of passion or personal desire.

Of course neither of these conclusions is satisfactory: the latter because it is suicidal to all social existence; and the earlier because the inevitable question arises: if the universe has produced these high qualities in man, the highest form of life we know, then may they not be an index and a clue to the true meaning of the universe?

It is at this point that thoughtful men are driven to a recognition of God. Modern scientific investigations have generally been based on the assumption, and have led to the conclusion, that there is an order and intelligence in the nature of things which our intelligence is capable of understanding. Things seem to behave in certain ascertainable and intelligible ways. In the world of natural law, in spite of unresolved areas, it is, on the whole, a cosmos and not a chaos that confronts us. There is a marvelous adaptation of form to function. Through science we seem to have discovered a creative integrating force that holds things together and an orderly dependable physical reality in the midst of which we can live with reasonable confidence and assurance. We have not yet explored more than the fringe of this physical universe, but we know that, so far as we have been able to understand and formulate its laws, we can gain greatly by conforming to them. Power, intelligently organized, apparently alive and going somewhere and which

must be recognized and adjusted to for the highest human welfare, is what modern man's scientific research has revealed as present in the universe.

Now that Power is God! It is the real and inescapable God, the supreme fact, on the physical level, which wise men recognize and to which they seek eagerly and unreservedly to conform. The basic universal religion, whether men call it so or not, is a recognition of and adjustment to the laws of the universe. This is the deepest and soundest piety there is. This much of God is accepted and obeyed even by men who may superficially think of themselves as atheists.

Here is an engineer, for example. He believes in this God of Natural Law even though he may never have awakened to the fact that it is really God he is believing in. But he accepts and obeys the facts, principles and mathematical formulas which make engineering successful. He never thinks of building a bridge in defiance of what he has learned about the strength of materials, nor of designing a truss without regard for the laws of stress and strain which he knows must be obeyed.

So with a farmer as he analyzes his soil or selects his seed or studies the weather. So with a doctor as he cooperates with the healing power of nature and tries to keep the wound clean, the metabolism balanced, the blood pressure normal, and the mind hopeful. In these and many other areas of practical life we all recognize that there is Something Else in the universe, Something Else that is reliable, ascertainable, dependable and also Something Else that cannot be ignored, disregarded or defied with impunity.

Now why should we think that only in the realm of morals there are no laws, that only in the area of human relations there are no facts or formulas that cannot be disregarded or defied?

As a matter of fact, we really know better. We all recognize in our best and clearest moments, that there is Something Else in human nature as well as in physical nature that cannot be successfully flouted or ignored. We know that honesty is better than dishonesty, truth better than falsehood, mercy better than cruelty, patience better than petulance, courage better than fear, beauty better than ugliness, love better than hatred. There are laws of economics, sociology and psychology which are as inflexible, dependable and universal as the laws of physics and chemistry, although in both the physical and the social sciences, our knowledge is still imperfect and the areas for exploration vast and challenging. Now this recognition in human affairs of "a Power not ourselves that makes for righteousness," to use Matthew Arnold's phrase, is one of the most helpful and reasonable approaches to a rediscovery of God by modern men. God is not something you have to accept because the church proclaims him nor on the basis of blind loyalty to tradition. God is here! Look about you and see his power, order, ongoing purpose, beauty, wisdom and goodness. Man has a secure foundation for his religious faith when he himself has actually seen God at work in his universe and recognized him as a contemporary fact and force.

Of course, when once we have fully awakened to the fact that God is not just a theory, a tradition or a dogma, but a living ever-present, all-pervasive reality from whom there is no escape and with whom we must do business, indeed are doing business all the time whether we know it or not, then theology becomes a matter of absorbing interest. For theology is simply the science of God, the collection and evaluation of all the facts we can learn about God and our relationship to him, just as geology is the science of the structure

of the earth or zoology the science which deals with living animals.

At this point a whole flood-tide of important and fascinating questions is unloosed within the human mind: What is God like? Is he in any sense personal? Does he reveal himself to men, and, if so, how? Can we communicate with him? What are his standards for human behavior and how can we learn what they are? What is his real character and if that is good, why are evil and suffering permitted in the world? To examine these questions, and the evidence in human thought and experience which might provide at least partial answers to them, is the function of the kind of theology which is really the science of our religious faith. To deal with these questions and to interpret theology in terms of non-technical everyday language which the thoughtful layman can understand and be interested in, is the purpose of this book.

To regard theology as the science of religious faith and to start out on a quest for knowledge and understanding as to the real character of God, his methods of operation, his requirements and purposes, so far as we can comprehend them, does not imply any lack of reverence. Indeed, it should imply quite the reverse. If the physicist enters upon his study of electricity or cosmic rays with a certain sense of awe and wonder as he delves into these aspects of the Infinite Mystery, putting questions to Nature and recognizing the necessity of being absolutely accurate and honest in what he does, with how much greater reverence and awe must the theologian, whether professional or amateur, proceed! For he is asking the deepest questions and seeking the profoundest answers in the universe. Reverence, humility, self-cleansing from all pride, dogmatism, partisan-

ship or arrogance must characterize his every thought and attitude if he is to enter the great laboratory of religious experience and aspiration and listen to and seek to apprehend the truth of God.

For the deepest thing about God is that he is contemporaneous and still at work. He is not merely a subject for archaeological research like a dead civilization. He did not say everything he had to say day before yesterday. Perhaps the most important thing we can do is not to find him but to let him find us. Our quest for him may be merely opening a door through which he may come to us as a living presence, filling our lives with meaning and power and joy. As has been said in a deeply spiritual hymn all too seldom sung:

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek him, seeking me——
It was not I that found, O Savior true,
No, I was found of thee.

There are two schools of theological thought today, one of which believes that we find God and the other that God reveals himself to us. Probably both are right! All deep and persistent drives in human nature exist in response to some reality. The fact that we seek and need God to complete and organize our thinking would be only a pathetic fumbling in the dark were not God there all the time seeking us but not imposing himself upon us.

What has been said in this chapter would be labeled "naturalism" by the professional theologian. There must be a place for both naturalism and revelation in a well-rounded theology. Nature is a good place to begin in our theological thinking for nature is always here. The universe ever presses on the mind of man for some sort of interpretation.

It is God's universe. He may be more than the universe we apprehend, and doubtless is, but he cannot be less; and no conception of God which leaves out his presence in nature will be adequate or satisfactory to modern men with their scientific training.

But man also is a part of the universe. All he has experienced, learned and felt must be included in any adequate interpretation of it. There is not only nature, there is human nature! This leads to what the theologian labels "humanism," which is the interpretation of all things according to human values. A universe which has flowered forth in humanity reveals aspects of the Divine Presence which nature alone could never express. Humanism, as held by some extreme modern humanists, means a substitution of humanity for God and a refusal to see in man an index to the meaning of the rest of the universe. But such an atheistic or agnostic humanism is only an eddy in the current. The noblest humanism has always exalted man as created in the image of God and therefore a trustworthy revelation of God's character.

But there is not only nature and man, there is Jesus. Christ also is part of the universe. Any interpretation of it which leaves him out is truncated and incomplete. There are aspects of God which we could never know if they had not been revealed to us in Christ. He is not the only revelation of God for, at their respective levels, God has revealed himself in nature and in humanity. But our Christian faith is that the Christ who cannot be ignored or explained away is the supreme revelation of God to man. Naturalism, alone, is not enough. Humanism is not enough. We have to remember Jesus and bring him into the picture. In other words we require what the professional theologian calls a "Chris-

tology," that is an interpretation of what Jesus contributes to our understanding of God. Hence the succeeding chapters on human nature and Jesus and the light they throw upon the meaning of the universe, the nature of God and the higher values of life.

CHAPTER II

WHAT IS A HUMAN PERSONALITY?

What is the most wonderful thing in the universe—so far as we know the universe from our balcony seats here on a second-class planet like the earth?

If you have ever been to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, and seen the marvelous reproduction of the human body in the museum there, you may well answer: the human body. That life-size, transparent, illuminated manikin which enables one to see all the organs of the body in their relation to one another and gives the observer an idea of the marvelous processes that take place in the life of the body—metabolism and nutrition, the composition, production and circulation of blood, the building of bones, separation and elimination of waste material, repair of injuries, and the operation of a telephone system of nerves with control over glands and muscles, the maintenance of constant and equal temperature and the delicate balances between acidity and alkalinity—that manikin, I say, sends you away with a new wonder and reverence for the wisdom of the body. How such a body can develop from the conjunction of two microscopic cells, how such an intricate mass of delicate tubes and tissues, more perishable than rubber, can automatically renew itself and keep on functioning in some cases for a hundred years—this is a miracle that dwarfs all other miracles in nature, folk-lore or tradition. When one meditates on the ghastly ruthlessness with which we desecrate this marvelous creation by blowing it to pieces on the

battle-field one wonders how we can ever expect to be forgiven. Man craves for miracles; but, when such a miracle as the human body is given him, he treats it as a peevish child might treat a rag doll or a broken toy.

But there is something far more wonderful than the human body, something about which we also have very immediate information and which, nevertheless, we treat just as stupidly and ruthlessly. This something is the human personality, which in our experience is always associated with the body, grows up with it, suffers with it, is capable of dominating it (sometimes) and comes at length to feel an independence from and superiority to it which is one of the deep and persistent roots of belief in human immortality.

Let us look at this thing we call the human personality: what is it, how does it operate, what insight does it afford into the central meaning of things, what are its defeats and victories, how can it best be defended and preserved, what is its ultimate destiny? Obviously the human personality is one of the most immediate and important facts in the universe and, moreover, it is the one thing about which we have absolutely first-hand information. All the rest of the universe we deduce by inferences drawn from sense impressions, but we do not need to infer the reality of personality. When it comes to speculation about the soul we have ring-side seats! Like Descartes, we have to say: "I think, therefore I am." We cannot doubt our own existence. Now what are we, what is a human personality? A rather rough and ready definition would be: It is a unit of being, a cell, a fragment of reality, which maintains unity and self-consciousness for from seventy-five to a hundred years in connection with a physical organism called a human body. This existence may possibly go on longer, apart from the body. While related to the body (as what the technicians would

call "a psycho-somatic entity") it is characterized by some very interesting and important qualities which serve to set it apart from all other things we know. Let us list these distinguishing marks of the human personality.

1. A vivid consciousness and awareness of the universe round about as picked up and interpreted by sight and sound, smell, taste and feeling. This sensitivity to environment the human being shares to varying degrees with the plants and animals up through which orders of being he has apparently come by a long and only partly understood process of evolution. But, because of other qualities presently to be catalogued, consciousness means more to man and has a richer content of emotional and intellectual values than it can possibly have for the animals.

2. One of the things which gives man's self-consciousness greater depth than that of the animals is his possession of a distinctively human intelligence and imagination. By these faculties he interprets and evaluates what the senses make him conscious of in a way quite impossible to animals. Harry Elmer Barnes is quoted as having once said rather grandiloquently that when one thought of the immense size of the universe as revealed by modern astronomy a being so small as man seemed to be quite negligible, astronomically speaking. To which George Albert Coe is reported to have replied: "Yes; but, astronomically speaking, man is the astronomer!" This capacity of the human personality by its intelligence and imagination to observe, interpret, measure and experiment with the universe lifts man at once into a very important and significant place among the facts that we know about the nature of reality.

3. Creative ability is a third characteristic of the human personality. This, too, has its humble beginnings among the animals as anyone who has ever studied a bird's nest, or

watched the struggles, as I have, of a colony of beavers determined to keep their dam built high enough to flood my woodland road, can well appreciate. But in man, with the development of the human hand and the discovery of tools and what can be done with them, this creative power has taken wings and gone on flights of fancy no animal can comprehend. Boats, and looms, houses, dishes, telephones, railroads, aeroplanes and radio, a city, a printing press, a cathedral organ and the cathedral itself, all testify to the power of imagination and intelligence to create things which nature alone would never have produced. They are the contribution of human nature to the universe.

4. But this creative aspect of man's nature is closely linked with another outstanding and distinctive feature—his sense of right and wrong. Kant once said that two things filled him with awe: the starry heavens above and the moral imperative within the soul of man. Men have not altogether agreed as to what is right and what is wrong but no race of human beings has ever been found without a sense of moral obligation to do what is considered right and refrain from doing what is accounted wrong. Ethical codes may be very crude and elementary, even largely bad and anti-social, but some code there always is—and the obligation to obey it. "There is honor even among thieves."

5. A fifth human characteristic which makes the nature of personality rich and meaningful is the sense of beauty. The earliest men we know about evidently discriminated between ugliness and beauty. They decorated their tools and even drew pictures, spirited and admirable pictures, upon the walls of their cave dwellings in prehistoric ages. Some years ago a dean of women in a western college observed that this sense of esthetic values might even control conduct to the benefit of individuals whose moral judgments were,

for some reason or other, out of gear. She said that college girls, who were only defiant when told that a certain course of action was immoral, became more thoughtful when confronted by the question: "That wouldn't be a very beautiful action, would it?" And so, to use the jargon of the classroom, esthetics may even serve upon occasion as an ad interim ethics.

6. Beyond all these qualities, the human personality is endowed with a capacity for devoted and self-sacrificial love. Sex love, parental love, family love, love of comrades, of country, of art and craft, of nature and ultimately of God, are great and driving motives in the human personality. They give birth to poetry, music, benevolence, prayer and worship. Man is deeply social. Without something and someone to love and be loved by, he would shrivel away. Someone has said that Robinson Crusoe is an utterly impossible story—not because a man alone on a desert island could not do all the fascinating things Defoe describes but because the chances are he would not. There would be no adequate motivation and his mentality would degenerate not quicken in his loneliness. Defoe sensed this and had to introduce the parrot and ultimately Man Friday to fill the vacuum.

Here then is this wonderful thing, the human personality. What does it signify? It is one of the most immediate and secure facts we know; but also, alas, one of the most easily overlooked. We sit inside it and look out on the physical world, on stars and solar systems, on mountains, plains and oceans, on all the external things that beat upon our senses, and fail to realize that the soul, which receives these sense impressions and interprets them, is the most wonderful thing of all.

If this is so, then human personality is not just a mere accidental by-product in the evolutionary process. On the con-

trary, it may be our best and most revealing insight into the meaning of the universe itself. If, at the height of its evolutionary development, the universe has produced conscious intelligence and regard for truth and beauty, then is it not reasonable to regard these things as revelations of the character of God?

This has very important bearing on the question of the personality of God. It would seem logical to believe that, if the universe has at last flowered forth in human personality, there must be something personal in God himself. I like Maude Royden's phrase, "personality in God."¹ God cannot be impersonal, non-personal or sub-personal. He must have the qualities which, on the human level, we know as personal—only in richer and vaster ways. We certainly cannot limit God to human personality. So far as it implies limitation it does not apply to God. So, perhaps, it is better to say that God is super-personal. There is personality in him, but it is divine personality, not human. Personality is a fact. It cannot be sidetracked and left out of account. It must be included in any adequate understanding of God as the intelligent directing Power behind and within the universe.

But alas! Human personality has its tragic side. It can be perverted and betrayed. It is haunted by sin. Maladjustment, fear, hatred, pride, self-will, greed, cruelty, disregard of God, disobedience to him—all these things are possible to the human personality that is misdirected and perverse. The poet has said that "death keeps the keys of all the creeds,"² but that is only part of it. It is death and sin and evil, suffering and human tragedy, that hold the keys to all creeds which are not utterly bland and superficial. The human personality has a terrible capacity and propensity to go wrong. It stands in need of salvation. This is the tragic fact at the heart of

humanity's pathetic and often ghastly story of robbery, murder, oppression, crime and war.

This leads straight into the problem of evil, pain and suffering and the way of salvation through Christ, to which the next few chapters will be devoted. But, before we plunge into those problems, let us stop and ask just what we mean by this word "salvation." Salvation implies being saved from something. But from what? Traditionally the church has said: from being lost, from hell, from sin, from disobedience to God and the wrath which falls on disobedience. Let us look at these words and try to translate them into language and ideas that are meaningful for us today.

What is it to be "lost"? Why not say that a lost soul is any human personality that is out of line with its true destiny? Its being lost is not an arbitrary act of God who condemns it to be lost, but rather the failure of the personality itself to keep on the beam. Just as there is a beam that guides an aeroplane so there are beams of right relationship with God, with nature, with fellow men, with one's own self. He who gets off the beam for any reason is lost, and may wander far out to sea or strike some dangerous mountain peak hidden amid the clouds.

What is "hell"? Not a subterranean torture chamber presided over by Satan where those who did wrong or believed the wrong theology or were baptized with too little water (or not at all) are roasted forever in hopeless and futile torment that accomplishes nothing to all eternity! There is no such hell as that. But there is a hell, nevertheless, and it is a portable individual hell which people can carry around with them! It is the state of suffering which inevitably results from breaking or disregarding the moral and spiritual laws of the universe. Not fire and brimstone but frustration and

remorse are its pain producers. But this hell is capable of being transformed into a purgatory, a place of cleansing and renewal. "War is hell," in a far deeper sense than General Sherman had ever thought of, but it is our hope that war is also purgatory and that out of it the human race may come with a better understanding of the broken laws of human solidarity and international good will which cause wars and a deeper purpose not to fall into that kind of hell again. So it may be with our little individual wars, our greed, dishonesty, and self-indulgence, our arrogance, pride and ruthlessness. They lead straight to hell because the moral universe is so constructed that they cannot ultimately lead anywhere else. But there is hope in that hell, hope that we may come to ourselves, repent, get back on the beam and be saved. This has been a long paragraph on hell, but hell is not easily described in a paragraph. Dante took much longer!

What has been said about hell has, inevitably, indicated the modern meaning of historic theological terms like sin and the wrath of God which needs must fall on disobedience. Sin is not just failure to observe some given code, sin is failure to live in harmony with basic moral and spiritual laws which are as deeply written in the universe and as inexorable in their reaction on those who break them as are the laws of gravitation or electricity. In this sense sin may sometimes be unconscious and unintentional. It is hell that wakes us up and tells us we have been sinning, if we did not know it before. And so the wrath of God is not personal pique or private vengeance on his part but the deeply implanted law that sin leads ultimately to hell. It is remedial and disciplinary in its purpose, not revengeful or sadistic. He wounds only that he may heal. We honor this principle in human relations, in the home and school, even in the theory of our penal system except where that system has

become horribly cruel and benighted. Must we not, therefore, conceive of God as not less just, humane and farsighted in his concern for human values than we are at our best and clearest moments?

To spiritually sensitive souls, moreover, sin has always been not just an impersonal and abstract violation of law which inevitably brings disastrous consequences but something deeper and more personal than that, a break in the personal relationships of harmony and trust that ought to exist between the individual human soul and God. Since personality is the wonderful thing it is and since our conception of God is incomplete without thinking of God also as in some sense personal, the up-reach of mystical religion has always been toward a personal harmony with God. Our souls are akin to him and, as St. Augustine said long ago, are restless until they rest in God. Sin in its deepest meaning, therefore, is not only a breaking of God's laws but a breaking of his heart—an estrangement from his outgoing love and a neglect of his revelation of fatherly concern as that revelation would come to us in a thousand ways, if we were only sensitive to it, and as it has come to us especially in Jesus and the cross.

CHAPTER III

HOW CAN WE BEST MEET SUFFERING AND EVIL?

"What's wrong with the world?" It is said that this question was once addressed to Will Rogers and the Sage of Oklahoma replied, with thought-provoking humor: "Oh, I reckon, just folks"! But then we must ask the deeper question: "What's wrong with the folks? And how did they get that way? And what can be done about it?"

Modern religious thinkers, of what is ordinarily called the liberal school, have been harshly criticised of late as having been shallowly optimistic. Not only fundamentalists but a group of what, for lack of a better name, are called neo-orthodox theologians have complained that modern religious thought by-passed the tragic element in life and ignored such grim facts as sin and suffering. They therefore propose a retreat to what they conceive to be the sterner, more authoritative gospel of three hundred years ago as expressed in the writings of the Reformers and those who immediately followed them.

While historical research is almost always stimulating and valuable, if it is critical and free and not undertaken just to bolster up a theory, nevertheless in the present situation it seems to me that what we need is not a retreat into the past but a courageous realistic facing of the present. Up to 1914 we all were optimists. The world seemed to be moving forward. Slavery had been abolished, Teddy Roosevelt had made progressive social ideals popular, woman suffrage was

coming and war was "the great illusion" which could not be made profitable any more and was therefore an anachronism. "On to the City of God," was our slogan. Even when World War I came, we still followed Woodrow Wilson into "a war to end war" and "to make the world safe for democracy."

All this is water over the dam now. The whole world and everybody's thinking have had a rude awakening. We all agree now with Sir Peter Teazle in Sheridan's play when he cried out: "This is a damned wicked world, Sir Oliver!"¹

What are we going to do about it? Just reviving the language or formulas of the sixteenth century won't solve our problem. Those formulas were undergirded by narrow conceptions of the nature of God and men and of Biblical authority and by an intolerance and dogmatism which are no longer acceptable. What we must do is face the facts, meet them with all the resources of historical knowledge, right reason, scientific research, up-to-date Biblical scholarship and enlightened Christian faith at our disposal and thus develop a philosophy of life in the face of adversity which modern men can accept and follow without reservation or retreat.

There is no doubt as to the evil of these days or as to the appalling wickedness of man and hardness of the human heart. This was dramatized in the summer of 1944 by the widely printed photograph of a long heap of bodies of dead Japanese soldiers lying as they fell, some in fantastic attitudes, and a bull-dozer mechanical ditch-digger hollowing out a huge long trench where they would soon be tumbled in and buried. Modern Efficiency at work—first to kill men wholesale by mechanical weapons of terrible potency and then to bury them with equal efficiency! But this picture, while more ghastly than the public is ordinarily permitted to see, was mild compared with the awful carnage of the

battle-field and the atrocities and starvation by blockade behind the battle-field. Modern warfare, which requires men to drop tons of bombs from aeroplanes, fully knowing the impossibility of separating so-called military objectives from the homes of their fellow men, lays a terrific burden of horror and remorse not only on the young men trained to drop the bombs but on all of us who participate in modern civilization and contribute to the carrying on of wars we never chose or approved. The logical climax of bombing, machine gunning and sinking by submarines and mines comes at last in the robot plane and atomic bomb which distribute terror and destruction without any slightest possible discrimination as to what or who is destroyed. This is total war—and it is not a flattering picture of the human race in action.

But why do we have wars? What goads men on to such outrageous behavior toward other men? The answer is: a complicated and explosive mixture of greed, fear, suspicion, aggression, economic exploitation, unwillingness to make concessions or give up advantages and preferred status when once secured, convictions of racial or national superiority, inherited prejudices and unresolved grievances, emotional intoxication with anger, hatred and revenge, and sometimes just a blind patriotism that sucks in many who are not hateful or grasping. All this, unrestrained by any profound conscientious scruples against starving, torturing or killing other human beings; but, on the contrary, actually promoted by unfair misleading propaganda and encouraged for the sake of profit either in selling the weapons of war or by exploiting situations where military supremacy promises to give economic power. And if, in revulsion against all this, one cries out: "I will be a pacifist and have nothing to do with such horrible things," what happens? He still shares in it all, for he must pay taxes and cannot possibly resign from mod-

ern society. And the non-pacifist tells him that by his pacifism he only holds back help from his own country, partially at least, and thereby helps the enemy to do the very things that he deplors. What a terrible mess it all is! No wonder contemporary theology tends to be very pessimistic about the human race.

But war is not the only evil. Consider the city slums in peace time or the situation of the Negro or the degradation caused by alcohol, gambling and prostitution. Think of the individual cruelties practised by village Napoleons and industrial Hitlers. Remember child-labor, and the plight of the share-croppers. Consider the attitude of the college-educated industrialist who once advocated increased Chinese immigration into Hawaii because, as he expressed it, "a Chinaman is the nearest approach there is to a human mule"! Then add to the account the harsh and cutting words which even relatively good and partially Christian people say to one another and to their children. Add the philandering husbands and unfaithful wives and the ordinary gangsters, thieves and cut-throats. Well, it *is* a damned wicked world, isn't it, Sir Oliver?

And there is not only evil in the world, there is pain. Think, if you can bear it, of the people dying of cancer, the victims of infantile paralysis, the cripples, the invalids, the defectives, the terror-ridden and obsessed. When one lets his imagination play on all of this burden of suffering and the added pain it brings to sympathetic relatives and friends, who can do so little but must stand by and suffer vicariously, surely the sensitive soul must cry out: "Why did God ever create such a world? Why does he permit it to continue?" One feels a renewed sympathy with Job who cried out in protest and longed to meet God face to face so that he might argue with him about it as man to man.² Why

couldn't God have made a human race as inoffensive as the butterflies and meadow-larks, as cooperative as the beavers and the bees? Isn't this wonderful thing called the human personality, so enthusiastically reported on in the preceding chapter, a terrific "flop"? And, if it reveals God, must it not shake our confidence in him as being either wise or good?

As one faces this problem of evil, made so insistent just now by its dramatization in war, the first thing to remember is that it is nothing new. The human race has faced it and made shift to keep on living in spite of it for thousands of years. After all, there is always more good than evil in the world and good has greater survival value. There is always more health than disease. More kind words are spoken and more loving deeds are done than cross and angry ones. Even in war-time the majority of people keep on being good husbands and wives, kind parents, efficient workmen, good neighbors, honest citizens. One must not see man and his problems through distorted lenses. Bad as the world is in certain aspects, as revealed by war, it has made undeniable and hopeful progress in other areas. Bad as the world is today, none of us would want to go back to the African jungle or even to the Roman Empire. Substantial social progress has been made in almost every phase of human life except in race relations and international adjustments. That there is so much pain in these things may possibly mean that these areas are, just now, the growing edge of human development. A musician friend of mine says that, in tuning an instrument, the time of greatest and most distressing dissonance is just before the instrument comes into tune. That is an interesting and hopeful analogy to remember in days like these.

But, of course, the fact that there is good as well as evil and, indeed more good than evil, does not explain or justify the presence of evil, though it does suggest that the problem:

"Why is there so much evil in the world?" ought in all fairness to be balanced by the parallel problem: "Why is there so much good in the world?" But, leaving that aside, we must inevitably ask: "Why evil at all?" If evil were only omitted, wouldn't this be "the best of all possible worlds"? And, if it isn't "the best of all possible worlds," isn't that a serious reflection on God? Is he weak or stupid or cruel that so much evil is permitted? This is the question our generation is bound to ask with a terrible urgency as it emerges from the wickedness, tragedy and suffering of war.

Many answers have been given to the problem of evil by thoughtful men and by great religions across the centuries. Let us list a few of them:

1. There is the answer of Greek tragedy, that evil is the result of blind relentless fate. Man cannot overthrow or escape it but he can be humbled and purified by it.

2. Zoroastrianism answers that evil is the result of an endless struggle between the good and evil forces, Mazda and Ahriman. Certain forms of Christianity have come close to this answer by their emphasis upon Satan and the "demonic" forces in the universe. There is an interesting revival of that word "demonic" in theological circles just now. At best and at bottom, however, Christianity has never accepted Satan as a divinity nor been content with a theory of evil which represents God as baffled, weak and limited.

3. Buddhism and other oriental religions, along with Christian Science, curiously enough, have tended toward some sort of denial of the reality of evil. By right thoughts and right discipline the soul can rise above this illusory world of sense and evil and attain Nirvana.

4. A considerable section of Biblically centered Christian thought has attributed evil to Adam's fall. What our first parents ate in the Garden of Eden seems to have been

not the apple of the knowledge of good and evil but the sour grapes of sin, and their children's teeth have been set on edge ever since! Hence the total, or at least persistent, depravity of the human race.

5. The modern materialist solves the problem very quickly and summarily: "There is nothing in the universe but matter and energy. Hence there are no moral values. Hence both good and evil are non-existent. Period!" But the trouble with this solution is that, as soon as the materialist goes out and tries to live, he has to make choices. And the moment he chooses, he has set up a standard of values and the problem of good and evil stares him in the face. Something that is not material, that is not compounded of matter and physical energy alone, has suddenly entered his universe. "'Tis man's perdition to be safe when for the truth he ought to die!"

6. Then there is the hedonist's solution. He measures all things by their contribution to happiness. Good is that which makes him feel happy, bad is that which makes him feel miserable. There is a lot of truth in this position if you look far enough ahead and do not just live by contemporary values and judgments. But when you look far enough ahead you introduce other values than immediate pleasure and pain and you really cease to be a hedonist.

7. In view of the unsatisfactory nature of all these classical solutions, each man must arrive at his own answer as he faces life itself. It will come to him out of the best he can learn from the Bible, from Christ and from the great souls of history, many of whom have suffered greatly but not unto despair, and from his own observation and experience. And, if he is a sensitive and reverent soul, he will recognize that the answer comes from God, for these are the ways in which God speaks to men.

My own conviction is that there is no completely ade-

quate and satisfactory answer to the problem of pain and evil but that, in a good universe, this problem is not so hard to manage as would be the problem of good in an evil universe. If the scheme of things is a checker-board, as Browning and Omar Khayyam have suggested, it is one with more and larger white squares than black ones; and the black ones, while they cannot be neatly explained away, can be dealt with and reduced. Perhaps the really important thing is not to be able to explain evil but to be able to meet it courageously and overcome it.

Here, at all events, are several considerations which point in the direction of a solution and give one a base of operations in the face of every threat and menace:

1. As has already been observed, good as well as evil is present in the world and in reassuringly large areas and strategic positions. Even in the midst of the inhumanity of war, soldiers live by courage, patience and loyalty to one another. No individual is wholly wicked, no group totally perverse. Chicago may have its gangsters, who get a disproportionate publicity, but it also has its social workers, churches, universities, art institute and museums, hospitals, clinics, schools and play-grounds. The checker-board is not all black—not even in Chicago, which John Burns once described as “a pocket-edition of hell.”

2. Evil is always negative, on the defensive, eventually self-destructive. It cannot create lasting entities. Even to attain its evil ends, it has to masquerade as good!

3. The possibility of moral evil is the price we pay for freedom and the greatness of our sinning is a measure of the power we have, if we only choose to use it, for good. Had man no moral choice, there could be no moral wrong. If he could never choose anything but right, he would be only an automaton. But life is not a player piano in which each

key is struck absolutely according to the controlling mechanism. It is more like an orchestra in which each player must bring his own instrument into tune, learn to read the score and respond to the conductor's baton. We are still in the tuning-up period. Some are beginning to learn the score and only a few are aware that there is a Conductor and what his signals mean.

4. Some things that seem evil at the moment turn out eventually to be good or seem to be over-ruled for good. Doesn't it say in the Bible that "the wrath of man shall praise thee,"³ and did not St. Paul believe that "all things work together for good to them that love God"?⁴ And Shakespeare said: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we may."⁵ Perhaps what we call evil is a part of the educational process through which the race must go in its apprenticeship until it learns how we may become fellow-workers with God.

5. Pain has always seemed to me more difficult to deal with. Here, of course, we must remember that much pain is beneficent. It is a signal light, warning us of danger. The trouble is that man does not always accurately diagnose what the real danger is. He is like the cat Professor Arthur E. Holt used to tell about who one day inadvertently sat on a hot stove lid which had just been laid upon the floor, and thereafter would never sit on anything that was round or flat! Pain, in a way, is part of the price of freedom. We could not be free without committing involuntary suicide at every turn were it not for the constant warnings by pain which hedge us round. Pain is punishment, but it is punishment meant not as revenge but as a reminder that God's laws cannot be broken with impunity.

6. Pain also has disciplinary value. Thousands of people still remember the placards in the San Francisco street-cars

in the hard days after the earthquake and fire, in 1906, when the city was lifting herself out of the ashes and starting to build again with smoky bricks amid the twisted steel:

It's easy enough to be pleasant
When life goes by like a song;
But the man worth while
Is the man who can smile
When everything goes dead wrong!

In our hours of adversity we turn for help and comfort not to the easy-going who never felt a wound but to those whose personalities have been tested and tempered in adversity, defeat and suffering. Job is a greater soul in the 23rd to 31st chapters than in the first. Suffering has quickened his insight and deepened his faith. If pain does this, it cannot be entirely evil.

7. But even so, granting to pain all its warning and disciplinary value, there are times when, to an honest mind, there are evidences of pain and suffering which seem, to all human comprehension, irrational and unnecessary in a well-ordered universe. One of America's kindest philosophers and profoundest thinkers in the field of ethics was Professor George Herbert Palmer. He was no atheist and no pessimist, but I can never forget these lines near the end of his beautiful *Life of Alice Freeman Palmer*: "But though no regrets are proper for the manner of her death, who can contemplate the fact of it and not call the world irrational if out of deference to a few particles of disordered matter it excludes so fair a spirit." ⁶ And so it seems to me all candid and objective religious thinking must recognize that there is a residuum of suffering for the existence of which there is no human justification. It remains an unsolved part of the Ultimate Mystery which is God.

But if the rationale of it is beyond our human understanding, the practical techniques for meeting it are not impossible to master. Nature has her own anaesthetics, and to these medical science has mercifully added others. And in areas where no anaesthetics avail, areas which are mental and spiritual rather than physical, we have God-given help and comfort, even if we have no explanation. This comfort is primarily in Jesus who was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Suffering came to him, but not as a warning—for he broke no laws of God. Nor did it come as a discipline—although the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says: "It became him for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory to make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering."⁷

But, if the suffering of Jesus was neither punishment, warning, nor discipline, was it not then akin to the irrational and unmerited suffering which is for modern man the darkest spot in his religious thinking? And if Jesus drank his cup of unmerited suffering without flinching and "never spoke a mumbling word," as the Negro spiritual puts it, then we can take new courage from his example. "What?" says Job. "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"⁸ Also, to him who meets suffering, defeat and evil without surrender and without bitterness or recrimination, there comes an inner victory.

And so the most important way to meet evil and suffering is not to explain it and "justify the ways of God to man," (although we are bound to travel that road as far as we can), but to face it with courage and imperturbability, without panic and without inner defeat. This was what Jesus did, and it is what Christian men, inspired by him, must always do. A very striking illustration may be dipped out of current literature. In "Ten Years in Japan" Ambassador Joseph

Grew, speaking of the days after Pearl Harbor when he and the entire embassy staff were held prisoners, says in his diary: "Faith, hope, and charity is a pretty solid basis for the guidance of mankind; but I have always felt, and I feel it now more than ever, that a better connotation of the essential intention of that scriptural passage can be expressed by the words 'faith, courage and love.' Those words give us a sound bearing for our future navigation, for both faith and hope need to be supported by courage if they are to be something more alive and vibrant than a mere pious platitude." 9

CHAPTER IV

A LOOK AT THE RELIGION OF JESUS

It has always been easier for men to worship Jesus than to understand him or obey him. Jesus himself recognized this when he said: "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). There is a commendable trend in religious thought today toward greater reverence for the person of Christ, and this is very desirable if it is founded on an understanding of Jesus, an acceptance of what he taught and a serious purpose to put his teachings into action. But there is always the subtle danger that men will substitute high-sounding words about Jesus, what they call "a high Christology," for plain understanding of his message and dedication to his way of life.

Before we consider any theory about Jesus, therefore, let us ask: What are the facts about him? What did he really teach? Until these questions are answered, the worship of Jesus may be merely a kind of Christian idol worship, adoration of a theological formula or an imaginary phantom, to which the name of Jesus has been attached, without its having any adequate content of what Jesus himself really taught and practised. The name may be there but the man and his message forgotten or distorted.

Christianity is a historical religion. Jesus is not a myth. There is no reasonable doubt but that the Great Galilean

lived and taught, gathered a group of disciples about him and died a martyr's death at the hands of Pontius Pilate. For the first thirty years after he died the things he did and said were reported by word of mouth by his disciples who organized a movement to perpetuate his teachings and to proclaim their faith that he had risen from the dead. They were expecting him to come again as the Messiah, the ideal divine king of Jewish hopes and dreams.

As the years went by and he did not physically return, as Christianity spread to distant lands, and as the generation which had heard him speak began to die away, these followers of Jesus committed to writing the oral tradition about Jesus that was current among them. Such of these written memoirs as have survived are incorporated in what we call the gospels. The dates of these gospels, all of them based on earlier documents and traditions, are now quite generally put by scholars approximately as follows: Mark from 60 to 70 A.D.; Luke, 70 to 80 A.D.; Matthew, 80 to 90 A.D.; John, 100 to 125 A.D. In addition to the gospels and much earlier in written form, we have the epistles of Paul, A.D. 50-60, which contain important material corroborating the information in the gospels concerning the character of Jesus and his message.

It should be noted that there is a marked contrast between the first three gospels, which are much alike in content and point of view and therefore called the synoptics (i.e., seeing-together), and John, which is distinctly different in content material, theological presuppositions and literary style. This is not to say that the synoptics are true and John imaginary. It is rather that the synoptics tend to be factual in emphasis, like a photograph, while John is more interpretative, like an oil painting. It will be seen at once how difficult, delicate and important are the research studies scholars have made

into the origin, composition, and interrelationship of these precious books.

There is not time nor space here to go into all the details of this scholarly research about the gospels. But it can safely be said that out of it emerges the reality of Jesus as a great prophetic figure who lived and taught in Galilee and died in Jerusalem; the essence of whose message is essentially preserved in the parables, in various epigrammatic sayings and in the Sermon on the Mount which contains the Lord's Prayer, the Golden Rule and the Beatitudes.

This teaching ministry was accompanied by the healing of many kinds of diseases and the relief of people who believed they were possessed by demons. It came to an end by the crucifixion of Jesus at the hands of Pontius Pilate, but at the instigation of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in Jerusalem. His disciples, however, announced that he rose from the dead, appeared to them and commissioned them to proclaim his message to all the world.

Rather slender material, you say, on which to erect a world religion? Not so! These teachings are so revolutionary and startling in content and Jesus' life so beautiful and exemplary that, wherever they have a fair chance to get through to the consciences and imaginations of men, they turn the existing order of things upside down. Such at least was the report in Thessalonica less than thirty years after the crucifixion when the arrival of Paul and his companions was hailed with the complaint: "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also . . . and these all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another King, one Jesus" (Acts 17:6-7).

Now what was this world-revolutionary and conscience-disturbing message of Jesus? The most compact, balanced and well-known summary of it is in the Lord's Prayer. Here,

in fifty or sixty words, Jesus has left us a microcosm of his religion. The Lord's Prayer is not just a petition, it implies a philosophy of life, a scale of values, a commitment to action, which, properly understood and accepted, give us the religion of Jesus in miniature. I have seen the Lord's Prayer reproduced in letters so small that it could be engraved on a medal the size of a dime and took a microscope to read it. And people have said, "How wonderful!" But what is really wonderful is that Jesus could put the essentials of the religion he came to teach all into these same fifty or sixty words. Let us examine the Lord's Prayer and see what it has to tell us. Even though, in its present form, the prayer shows the influence of the liturgical use made of it in early days, still that liturgical use only gives added testimony to its early recognition as of paramount importance. It still remains our best and most compact summary of Jesus' teachings.

Eight basic truths stand out clearly in a study of the Lord's Prayer: ¹

1. The prayer begins: "Our Father who art in heaven." The word heaven is in the plural in the original, i.e., it is heavens. The picture in Jesus' mind is not of God sitting aloft on a great white throne in a golden city, but of a God whose character is fatherly and who dwells not only on earth but in the heavens, that is in all the majesty of the universe. We have become so conditioned in our thinking about heaven by the imagery of the book of Revelation, that, to make the Lord's Prayer say to us what Jesus meant (the book of Revelation had not been written in his day), we ought really to say: "Our Father who art in all the universe, . . . thy will be done on earth as it is in the universe." That would make the prayer come alive for many a modern-minded scientifically trained man or woman. A student once

startled me by simply changing "heaven" to "universe" as he repeated the Lord's Prayer in leading chapel. Try saying it out loud that way, and see. This sense that Jesus had of God's presence in nature is also revealed in other sayings of his about the flowers, the birds, the wind and the weather. That he was a nature lover and saw God at work in the universe cannot be doubted.

2. "Hallowed be thy name" is the next great affirmation of human need sounded in the prayer. It affirms man's need of worship. It implies that prayer, at its highest and best, starts with adoration of God. Jesus believed that the human heart must bow down before the wonder and holiness of God and cry on bended knee: "Hallowed be thy name." Religion for him was not a creed nor an intellectual formulation, it was an attitude toward God, an experience of spiritual communion with the Most High. Other illustrations of Jesus' great concern about worship may be found in the story of his cleansing of the temple and his parable of the pharisee and the publican who went up into the temple to pray.² We also know that Jesus himself often rose up early in the morning that he might go out into the hills and pray alone.

3. "Thy Kingdom come." There can be no doubt that Jesus had a great deal to say about what he called the Kingdom of God. His parables make plain that this was not just a miraculous Messianic civilization to be set up some time in the future but was already present in the hearts of men wherever they accepted the will of God and tried to live in obedience to it. And yet his constant use of the word "Kingdom" has important implications of social organization, too. The Kingdom of heaven is not merely an anarchy of good individuals. It is a social order pervaded by the spirit of Jesus, a society organized in harmony with the will of

God. This is a large order—but Jesus told us to pray for it. If one will take a concordance and look up all the references Jesus made to the Kingdom, the impression will grow that this idea was very central in his teaching. And, when one compares what he had to say about the Kingdom with the ideas and expectations people in his day had about the Messianic era, the contrast is startling and important.

4. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in the heavens." Jesus lived in the spirit of the Psalmist who cried out: "I delight to do thy will, O God." He conceived of the will of God as something positive, constructive, beneficent, a program for personal living and a basic pattern in the universe as well. Good Catholics are bidden to pray in a curious and thought-provoking phrase, "for the Pope's intention"—that is for the prosperity of the things the Pope desires to see accomplished. Good Christians ought to pray and dedicate their lives to the intention of God. There is something he is seeking to accomplish and he has certain ways of doing it. Our task as Christians is to seek to learn the will of God and do it.

But there are dark and difficult days when it is hard to know the will of God or when that will seems, so far as we can ascertain it, to move contrary to our preferences and deep desires. What then? In such hours we need to remember that Jesus met this experience also. All three synoptic gospels record his wrestling in the garden of Gethsemane with the great decision concerning his approaching death. It is highly significant that he who taught his disciples to pray "Thy will be done," in the supreme crisis of his life and in the shadow of defeat nevertheless still made his own prayer: "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take this cup away from me: nevertheless not what I will but what Thou wilt."

5. The prayer now moves on to three specific petitions, the first of them being: "Give us this day our daily bread." At first glance this seems like a very prosaic and mundane request. But does it not afford us a very important look into the mind of Jesus? He included bread in the prayer because he conceived of it as the gift of God. Back of the baker and the miller he saw the beneficent creative activity of God who makes the rain to fall and the seed to grow and thus provides both seed-time and harvest to give food to men. My little grandson says this grace at table: "We thank thee, Father, kind and good, for all who work to give us food." Jesus would approve of that but would remember that "all" includes God as the ultimate giver.

But may there not be more in this petition than just a mystical appreciation and reverence for God's part in what are so often dismissed as the commonplace things of life? Walter Rauschenbusch has called attention to what he calls "the mighty plural" in this petition.³ Jesus does not teach us to pray for bread for ourselves alone. The words "us" and "our" make us reach out in our imagination and include all others who stand in need of daily bread. And by bread did Jesus mean just the wheaten loaf? Or is bread a poetic symbol for all man's basic needs—food, clothing, shelter, education, play, community life? Without these, bread alone is insufficient. And to pray for these things is to pray for a just, equitable social order within which these things are made possible for all. Perhaps this apparently simple and prosaic petition has tremendous implications as to the social applications of the gospel.

6. The second of these three petitions comes still nearer to the heart of life. It is: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Jesus knew that we might have bread and all other physical necessities and yet

be utterly miserable. Beneath and beyond the economic problem lies the deeper and subtler one of right personal relationships. Jesus knew the quarrels, the jealousies and remembered grudges, the personal animosities, the slights, insults, harsh words and harsher deeds, the injustices, oppressions, wars and exploitation which destroy the peace of men and leave behind them cries for punishment and revenge in the outer world and hatred and bitterness within. Knowing this he put forgiveness at the very heart of his teaching.

Elsewhere in the Sermon on the Mount we find this theme repeated with many variations: "Blessed are the meek," "Blessed are the merciful," "turn the other cheek," "go the second mile," "love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you," "judge not, that ye be not judged" and "if therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift."

Later generations of theologians, in developing the doctrine of the atonement, have sometimes seemed to make it appear that, in seeking God's forgiveness of our sins, we have to depend solely upon the sacrificial death of Jesus, that God's wrath against our sin is appeased and our punishment cancelled out by the sufferings of Jesus on the cross. This is a perversion of the meaning of the cross and an un-Christian interpretation of the atonement, as we shall show later. Here it is sufficient to note that what Jesus said was quite different from this traditional but erroneous doctrine. He said simply: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses." What could be more clear-cut and explicit as to the conditions required for the forgiveness of sins?

Yet it is so much easier just to believe a rather mechanical doctrine about the blood of Jesus being applied to wash away our sins that men have often preferred rather to take refuge in the magic formula than to go out into the world and undertake the hard practice of Jesus' principle of forgiveness and invincible good will.

7. Still closer to the center of personal life comes the final petition of the prayer: "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." The Aramaic phrase that Jesus used probably carried more of the meaning of "let us not yield unto" than the Greek and English "lead us not into." ⁴ Certainly God has better occupations than going around leading poor frail human souls into temptation! What we need is someone or something to lead us away from temptation. The parallel phrase, "deliver us from evil," shows quite conclusively that this was what Jesus meant.

Now why is this put at the climax of the prayer? Because deeper than economic needs or inter-personal adjustments, symbolized by the prayer for daily bread and for forgiveness, is the most penetrating need of all—the need of personal integrity. If in the depths of a man's own personal life he is a castaway, then he is a lost soul indeed. If a man sinks to the point where he has destroyed his sense of the fine line which divides good and evil so that he calls good, evil, and evil, good, calls sweet, bitter, and bitter, sweet, how desperate is his moral situation! As Jesus said on another occasion: "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness!" ⁵ The fight for character is the supreme and ultimate fight that every man must make. To lose one's moral standards and spiritual sensitivity, to sell out the higher values in life to the lower—that is the supreme disaster. Against that we must all stand guard and pray: "Lead us away from the temptations that would warp our

personalities and rot the fibre of our moral being. Deliver us from evil."

Such, in barest outline, was the religion of Jesus. Christianity begins here! Whatever else it may become, however complicated the doctrines it may subsequently evolve, here is the historic rock on which it is founded. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." ⁶ If any man would be a Christian, obviously he must accept and follow the religion of Jesus so far as he can understand it and actually apply it to his life.

Someone will cry out: "But you have over-simplified it! Jesus' personal religion contained much else: his attitude toward Judaism, his apparent acceptance of current ideas about possession by demons and especially his conception of the messiahship and the approaching catastrophic end of the world—what is called in technical language his apocalypticism." My answer is that, for our age and its needs, these things are peripheral as well as subject to grave historical questioning. They are on the margin, so far as their value for the average man or any applicability to his problems are concerned. Each age finds in Jesus the things that, for it, are meaningful and valuable. The teachings summarized in this chapter speak to the condition of the world today. For us and our needs they are the very heart of the religion of Jesus.

Someone else may cry out: "Yes, but there is also a religion *about* Jesus and you have left that out." That is true, but it will be taken up in a subsequent chapter. Here is where we must begin. No religion about Jesus has any just claim upon his name unless it clearly sees and accepts as first and basic the religion which Jesus himself taught and in the light of which he lived and died. Christianity is an historical religion. If you cut it off from what Jesus was and what he taught, you have something other than Christianity.

There is more, however, to the story of Jesus than his life. There is his death! The impression this made upon his followers is clear from the proportionately large space devoted to it in the written record in the gospels. Paul also emphasized it. "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified," he wrote to the little church in Corinth.⁷ Later ages developed out of the suffering and death of Jesus the important and influential doctrine of the atonement, which we shall discuss later. Here we are concerned with what the crucifixion meant to Jesus himself.

Early in his ministry, Jesus seems not to have foreseen it. In the sunny idyllic days in Galilee he was content to proclaim the eternal verities of the Kingdom, to heal the sick and to teach the twelve. Then came the execution of John the Baptist and finally his decision to proclaim his message at the center of his people's religious and political life. From the time "he set his face steadfastly to go unto Jerusalem,"⁸ he seems quite clearly to have foreseen his possible rejection and martyrdom. Apparently, however, he did not accept it as irrevocable until his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Having accepted death as the last full measure of devotion, he met it with sublime faith and courage, forgiving the soldiers who crucified him and comforting the repentant thief on the cross beside him. His religion did not fail him in the last dread hour of defeat, agony and death.

It is interesting to study the seven words from the cross. In Mark, the earliest gospel, the scene is one of unrelieved gloom and the only word of Jesus recorded is the poignant cry: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"⁹ Some have argued from this that Jesus did lose faith on the cross. But it must be remembered that this cry is a quotation from the twenty-second Psalm which begins with these

same words. Jesus knew the Psalms by heart; and, when he expressed his feelings in the first verse of this Psalm, he was well aware of the rest of it. Now read the twenty-second Psalm. It is not a cry of defeat, but of victory out of suffering, and it comes to a magnificent climax in the twenty-first verse where the psalmist cries: "Yea, from the horns of the wild oxen thou hast answered me!"

The other three gospels add to the picture words that are in keeping with Jesus' spirit. Luke gives us his prayer for the forgiveness of his executioners, the word of comfort to the dying thief and the final: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Matthew follows Mark with no other word than the cry from the twenty-second Psalm and with both thieves unrepentant and railing at him. John adds the tender words committing his mother to the care of John, the very human cry: "I thirst," and the sublime conclusion: "It is finished!" There is also an interesting possible side-light in Paul's word: "Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it";¹⁰ and the author of I Peter says: "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: who his own self bare our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed."¹¹

Such was the religion of Jesus. He taught it, he lived it, he died in its spirit. But, because of it, he lives forever more!

CHAPTER V

WHAT ABOUT THE MIRACLES?

Is there any place for miracles in a modern man's religion, or any value in them?

In one sense miracles are happening all about us every day! If Elijah made an axe to swim, we make thousands of tons of steel to float in our great ships. If Peter walked on the water, we walk in the air with our aeroplanes, and at a speed of 400 miles per hour. We can cause ice to form under the equator, we can speak and be heard perfectly a thousand miles away. Jesus saved a few lives by his healing power, but by modern medical science, we have increased the average length of all lives by ten or twenty years and have almost banished from the earth dread diseases like smallpox, yellow fever and typhoid. By anaesthetics and antiseptic surgery, by x-rays and sulfa drugs, by hygiene and sanitation, we have saved and prolonged the lives of millions. Some people say the age of miracles is past, but that is very foolish, for the greatest miracles of all the ages are taking place here every day right before you!

But there *is* a difference. These modern miracles are performed in understandable ways in conformity to natural law. We think we know how we do them, though as a matter of fact we deal with tremendously mysterious powers like electricity, gravitation, chemical reactions, bodily processes and natural law itself. All these things we do not really understand. We just accept them and, by adjusting to the way they operate, let them achieve our modern miracles

for us. The miracles of "the old-time religion" were regarded differently. They were conceived of as the immediate operation of God through his interposition, in direct conflict with natural law, not in conformity to it. They were regarded, therefore, as revealing the actual presence of God and demonstrating his power. Their value was not so much in what they accomplished as in what they proved. They showed that God was still alive and could come down and do things which ordinarily no man could do.

One's attitude toward miracles depends basically, therefore, upon one's conception of God. A generation that thinks of God as an absentee landlord, sitting remote from earth in his well-lighted heaven, will inevitably crave evidence of his continual power and concern for humankind. It will pray for, expect and rejoice in strange and otherwise unaccountable phenomena which seem to prove that God still lives.

On the other hand, a generation that thinks of God as ever present in his universe, continually sustaining and recreating it, and operating it through what we call natural laws, will find in those laws and in the universe itself the supreme and ever-present miracle. We always need miracles to demonstrate God, but the modern man finds these miracles all about him and God is demonstrated by every new-blown rose or new-born babe. After all, a baby is the greatest miracle there is. I have been told that when he was ninety-eight years old, Charles W. Eliot, long president of Harvard, went to the home of a neighbor in the summer colony at Bar Harbor, a young woman with a little baby, and said: "Let me hold your baby." For a long time the old scholar sat there in the sunshine of a summer day holding the baby in his arms, gazing at it and meditating upon it; and then, giving it back to the mother, went silently away. If you are

conscious of the miracles all about you, you will be conscious of God and need no other lesser miracles to prove his presence and his power. Don't wait for some stupendous miracle to reveal God to you—just hold a baby in your arms!

Just as the evidence for the reality and character of God is all about us and not primarily dependent upon any miracles of long ago concerning whose nature and authenticity we have no adequate means of investigation and report, so the divinity and authority of Christ are in no way dependent upon the miracles attributed to him. Whether they occurred or not is a secondary question which we shall deal with presently, but we revere, honor and worship him for very different reasons than our wonder at his miracles. What appeals to us is his character, not his power to multiply loaves and fishes. It is the wisdom of what he said and the Godlike quality of his life that makes us feel he was divine, not his power to walk on water or change water into wine. He might have had power to do even more astounding things than these in the outer physical world but we would not reverence him for them if he had not been good. The divinity of Christ is demonstrated daily by his message to the human heart today, not by miracles the evidence for which we cannot adequately examine and which occurred nineteen hundred years ago. The authority of Christ comes from the contemporary spiritual value of his teachings and from the continuous possibility of trying them out in life and verifying them in our own experience.

When one has gained this underlying understanding of the relative unimportance of miracles as a basis of faith, because faith rests on moral qualities and not on physical power, then one can examine the miracles quite objectively and candidly. There is nothing to lose, whatever interpretation one makes of them; and so the only motive one has is

the quest for truth. What were the miracles? What really happened? What do they reveal about Jesus? What is the evidence, pro and con?

There seem to be three classes of miracles in the gospel story, miracles of healing, miracles due to misunderstanding and miracles of legendary misinterpretation due to the credulous, unscientific character of first century thought.

1. The miracles of healing present little difficulty. Considering that our written record of them comes from at least thirty years subsequent to their occurrence, they are remarkably factual, restrained and believable. We see similar examples of mental healing in the modern world. Given so marvelous and dynamic a personality as that of Jesus, and it was inevitable that he should impart health and healing to all with whom he came in contact. The remarkable thing would have been had no such results followed him.

Along with the miracles of healing, mention should be made of the cases of casting out of demons, for these are very definitely examples of mental healing. The demoniac was a person who, accepting the current explanation of that day, believed that his neurotic or psychotic symptoms were caused by the malevolence of some devil who had taken up residence within him. Whether or not Jesus himself agreed with this theory we do not know, but the authors of the synoptic gospels never doubted it. Curiously enough, however, demonic possession is never mentioned in the Fourth Gospel. But Jesus cured demon possession by a skillful use of suggestion which, with the influence of his sanity, serenity and strength behind it, freed the poor demoniac from his fearful delusion and left him sitting before the Master "clothed and in his right mind." ¹

2. Miracles of misunderstanding are illustrated by the

story of Jesus' alleged cursing of the fig tree.² What we probably have here is a misunderstood parable. Jesus was warning his disciples not to be like a tree with no fruit and bearing nothing but leaves. Returning later and finding the tree withered, the miracle-hungry first-century mind said: "Aha, a miracle! He cursed the tree and now look at it!" As a boy in California, I have seen my own fig tree laid low in a single day by a gopher gnawing at the roots. The observers of Jesus' day should have looked for the gopher! Jesus had better business than cursing fig trees! It is "out of character" for him to do so.

It seems quite possible that the miracle of the loaves and fishes was similarly a miracle of misunderstanding.³ Scientifically, it is very hard even to conceive of this miracle. It is quite easy to understand that, since these people were largely pilgrims away from home anyway, others among them had lunch baskets besides the boy with the five loaves and two fishes. What Jesus did was to organize them and set an example of sharing. It is not hard to understand how, in a credulous miracle-loving age, the idea might soon spread that there had been something miraculous about the way it turned out that there was food enough for all. If anyone prefers to believe that, in some utterly incomprehensible fashion, the bread and fish expanded in Jesus' hands, growing a new piece of bread and fish as fast as he broke off a fragment, that is quite his privilege. But it has nothing to do with his Christianity. Christianity is a way of life and a faith in God as he is related to us in our own lives. Nobody expects God to deal with us in such a way today.

It is also interesting to note that the disciples themselves apparently did not regard the feeding of the multitude as a miracle at the time it happened. That idea only developed later as they thought about it. This is made quite clear by

Mark 6:52 where, after narrating their surprise at Jesus coming to them on the sea, the author adds, as his own comment: "For they understood not concerning the loaves, for their heart was hardened." Mark recognized that if the disciples had just seen Jesus create *ex nihilo* food enough for 5,000 men, they ought to have been quite ready for any minor miracle that might come along. The explanation is that it had not occurred to them at the time of the feeding of the multitude that it was a miracle.

The changing of water into wine,⁴ while the story is very late and involves quite unbelievable chemical processes, may also rest upon the foundation of a misunderstood parable or saying of Jesus. He who spoke of the peril of putting new wine into old wine-skins may well have said something to the effect that the water of the Kingdom of God is better than the wine of the pharisees. It would not have been difficult for an imaginative unscientific age to develop this into a legend that Jesus actually did change water into wine. In any case, nobody today expects God to change water into wine except through regular vintage procedure—and many of us prefer not to drink it, even so.

3. This leads to a third class of miracles—those which are quite obviously legendary developments of actual events. Here belong the stories of Jesus stilling the tempest⁵ and also of his walking on the sea.⁶ The latter is quite simple. The Greek preposition translated "on" the sea is equally capable of being translated "beside" the sea. In the dim light of the morning Jesus came to them walking along beside the sea. Later imaginative legendary reports made it *on* the sea. But it is noteworthy that one account still preserves the revealing observation: "and straightway the boat was at the land whither they were going."

As to the stilling of the tempest, what probably happened

was the passing of a squall. Such storms arise and pass quickly on the lake of Galilee. The storm Jesus quelled was in the hearts of his disciples. It was to them that he said, "Peace, be still." It was their conclusion, natural but not necessarily true, that "the wind and the sea obey him." The event happened just as narrated and the legend of a miracle grew up around it. I well remember that when this interpretation was first presented to me by Professor Benjamin W. Bacon while I was a student at Yale, I said: "Yes, but suppose the storm had beaten over the boat and swamped it and they had been drowned—what then?" To this Professor Bacon replied: "The day came when the storm did swamp the boat—that day was on Calvary!"

The point to be kept steadily in mind in all study of the miracles is that our faith in Jesus is not in any way dependent upon any physical miracle. All such narratives deal with events subject to the laws of evidence and open to the most searching historical research. If, after such uninhibited examination, you feel they really happened, well and good. If you feel they didn't happen, well and good also. In either case the Lord's Prayer, the Golden Rule, the Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount, the parables, the significance of the Cross, are entirely unchanged—and these, not the miracles, are the part of Christianity which has authority over our souls and meaning for our lives today.

"Not so fast!" someone protests. "There is the virgin birth and there is the resurrection; these are miracles and a full recognition of the divinity of Christ depends on our accepting them." This gives rise to misconceptions so widespread and so stoutly held by certain fundamentalist and neo-orthodox groups that it deserves very careful consideration.

First, as to the virgin birth. While this idea got firmly rooted early in traditional Christianity, it is hardly present at all in the New Testament. The only references to it are in the early chapters of Matthew⁷ and Luke,⁸ and those gospels disregard it as soon as the infancy narratives are passed. Mark, the earliest gospel, never mentions it. John, with the highest Christology of all, is completely silent about it, though at the date John was written the story of the virgin birth was already known. Paul, in whose thinking our noblest Christology has its deepest root, apparently had never heard of the virgin birth. Indeed, with quite a contrary slant, he says: "God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law." In his letter to the Romans Paul speaks of God as "sending his own Son in likeness of sinful flesh" and, again, he speaks of the Israelites "of whom is Christ, as concerning the flesh." What is true of Paul is true of all the rest of the New Testament—never once is the doctrine of the virgin birth mentioned or even hinted at. Thus we can understand the wit and wisdom of the theological student before an examining council who, when asked "What is your opinion about the virgin birth?" is said to have replied, "I hold strongly with St. Paul on that point!"

As a matter of fact, not only is our faith in the divinity of Christ independent of the virgin birth, but church history seems to indicate that the doctrine itself grew up not as a defense of his divinity but of his humanity! A very interesting school of early Christians, the Gnostics, later repudiated as heretics, believed that the divine nature of Jesus was a ghostly something which entered his human personality at the baptism and departed at the crucifixion. The emphasis on "born of the Virgin Mary" in the Apostles Creed grew out of second-century theological controversy and was meant to emphasize that the divine and human natures were

both present in Jesus from the very beginning. This is good theology, but there are better reasons for believing in it than the scientifically difficult assertion of a virgin birth and the extremely slender historical evidence for its occurrence. Moreover, so far as it is taken in some religious circles to imply that birth by one parent alone would be holier than birth by two, or that God's power is not present in birth by regular and normal processes, the doctrine becomes positively repulsive. On the other hand, the beautiful stories of the annunciation should be made applicable to every mother and interpreted as meaning that every birth is sacred and, in the truest sense, a miracle.

Leaving for the next chapter a discussion of the resurrection of Jesus and its meaning for men today, we come now to the most basic and popularly held miracle of all, the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible. Some reader may have said already: "Evidence for the miracles? Why they are recorded in the Bible. That is God's infallible and inerrant Holy Word. No further evidence is necessary!"

That the Bible is inspired is obvious, proved by its power to inspire all who come to it with a reverent and sympathetic spirit. It is the world's greatest written source of spiritual truth, its supreme religious classic, its greatest storehouse of practical wisdom, ethical ideals and spiritual insights. It is the record of a marvelous revelation of God's truth and presence made to men of many moods in all sorts of situations over hundreds of years and coming to a glorious and radiant climax in Jesus Christ. This all Christians wholeheartedly believe.

But this is not to say that it is uniformly authoritative, inerrant or infallible. A calm, quiet, fearless study of the Bible itself will quickly reveal that it contains many contradictions and inaccuracies and shows evidence of con-

tinued growth from lower and less developed to higher and truer points of view. There are two quite different and conflicting accounts of the creation in the early chapters of Genesis. Statistics about the same event differ widely between the books of Kings and Chronicles.⁹ Much more important are the variations in ethical standards. Child-sacrifice is recognized and unrebuked in the stories of Jephthah's daughter¹⁰ and the sacrifice of Isaac,¹¹ but Micah definitely repudiates this horrible barbarity: "Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?—What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love kindness and to walk humbly with thy God?"¹² The Psalmist may cry out in his bitterness against Babylon: "Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the rock,"¹³ but Jesus taught that it would be better for a man if the rock were hung about his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea rather than that he should mistreat a little child.

This point does not need to be labored. Jesus himself clearly repudiated the idea of Biblical infallibility when he said in several connections: "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time" thus and so, "but I say unto you" something quite different and more exacting.¹⁴ Jesus felt perfectly free to point out the limitations and imperfections of the Old Testament. But what about the New Testament? Here, too, we have our treasure in earthen vessels. The accounts in the gospels do not altogether harmonize, the details reported about the resurrection, for example, do not agree, Paul's account of his disagreement with Peter as given in Galatians is very much smoothed down and even glossed over when reported several years later in the book of Acts.¹⁵ The conception of the second coming in John is quite different from that set forth in Revelation, and the Epistle of

James ¹⁶ takes a decidedly different view of faith than Paul—so much so that Luther is reported to have described James as a “right strawy epistle”!

The most sane and reasonable conclusion to come to about the Bible is that it is a compact collection of tremendously important religious books, written by human authors under human limitations, but dealing with divine things and recording important and soul-stirring revelations and spiritual insights that came to men in the course of over a thousand years of religious history and development. The Bible claims for itself no such infallibility as has sometimes been claimed for it and God's revelation of himself is not so much in the written book as in the events the book records. The “Word of God” is not a written document, it is a vital transforming experience that has come to living men all across the centuries.

With this understanding we can read the Bible without apologies or reservations. We have a touch-stone by which to test its developing ethics and sometimes crude religious ideas. That touch-stone is Jesus! Whatever is in harmony with his spirit we can accept. Whatever is out of harmony with Jesus is obviously of value only to remind us of the rock from whence we were hewn and the pit whence we were digged.

CHAPTER VI

THREE POSSIBLE VIEWS OF THE RESURRECTION

I well remember the surprise that came to me as a freshman in one of the most secular of our state universities, when, in a textbook on European History by Professor George Burton Adams of Yale, I came across the following statement about Christianity in the Roman Empire:

For the earnest man . . . Christianity possessed an enormous advantage over its rivals in the character of its teaching and the confidence of its faith. The Christian teacher did not say: "I believe." He said: "I know." On the question of immortality he appealed to an actual case of resurrection, supported, as he said, by the testimony of many witnesses—the founder of his faith, not raised from the dead by some miracle-worker calling him forth by incantations, but rising, himself, by the power of an inner and higher life which was beyond the reach of death, the first fruits of them that slept. On the question of the forgiveness of sin he appealed to the cases of innumerable individuals—even of communities and tribes—transformed by the power of his gospel from lives of sin and degradation to orderly and righteous living.¹

That a history professor in a great university like Yale should say anything like that seemed positively unbelievable to a freshman in the University of California, where religion, in those days at least, was carefully ignored and students transferring from other colleges found no credit given them for courses they might have taken elsewhere in

Religion or Bible. Credit for Herbert Spencer's Philosophy or for Greek Mythology, certainly—but not for the Bible! Although some of our strongest professors, men like Joseph Le Conte, Charles Mills Gayley, E. E. Brown, C. B. Bradley, William E. Ritter, and others were Christians, the general atmosphere of the university at the turn of the century, among undergraduates at least, was a tacit assumption that religion was a belated survival from the age of superstition, and that the Bible, as one instructor said openly, was “just a collection of fish stories.” Yet here was a respectable scholarly historian honoring Christianity and recognizing the central importance and influence of the resurrection. It was astounding.

I am now firmly convinced that Professor Adams was right in recognizing this. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are the central facts of history. Each would be almost meaningless without the other. Their sober historical reality is proved by the rise and early history of the Christian Church. Wherever the early Christians went they based their message on two great central facts—the death and resurrection of Jesus.

But is not this in striking conflict with the position taken on miracles in the preceding chapter? Must we not class the resurrection along with the nature miracles, and is it not just as irrelevant to Christianity as the virgin birth? I do not think so, and for two reasons: first of all, because the resurrection stands historically on very different ground from the virgin birth and is woven into the fabric of the New Testament at every turn; and, secondly, because it is not a physical miracle at all, but a spiritual one. It is physical miracles, which involve the violation of God's established methods of operation through natural law, that the modern scientific mind finds it difficult to accept. But spiritual mira-

cles involve no defiance or setting aside of natural law. Rather, they reveal the operation of spiritual laws. Miracles of healing are essentially spiritual. They result not from the breaking of any natural law but from coming into harmony with spiritual laws of faith, hope, love and prayer. Paul's conversion, and every conversion since, represents a spiritual miracle. John Bunyan's dream in Bedford jail, and E. Stanley Jones' transforming experience, as narrated in *The Christ of the Indian Road*, are spiritual miracles. They involve no violation of physical law. They simply show what happens when human souls come in tune with God. When people obey God's spiritual laws things become possible that are miracles from a this-worldly point of view. The resurrection of Jesus was such a miracle.

"But," someone says, "didn't he burst open the tomb, demonstrate a body that could be touched and seen, and yet go up and disappear in the clouds and never come down again? Wasn't that a breaking of physical laws?"

Here we must stop and ask: Just what do you mean by the resurrection? What is its essential value for our Christian faith? Wherein is there good historical evidence for it? And, at what points may it have gathered to itself later legendary additions? To answer these questions, we must look at the record in the New Testament.

Our earliest witness to the reality of the resurrection of Jesus is St. Paul, who wrote his epistles less than thirty years after the event. After listing various resurrection appearances of Jesus about which he says he has been told, he tells the Corinthians that "last of all, as to the child untimely born, he appeared to me also." It is very important to note that St. Paul makes no mention of the empty tomb or of the ascension. His conception of the resurrection is not physical but spiritual, akin to his experience on the Damascus road.

Paul believed tremendously in the resurrection, preached it wherever he went and found in it, along with the cross and inseparable from the cross, the supreme motivation of the Christian life. He believed that Christ was alive, a potent influence in the lives of all who accepted him and tried to follow him. But he knew nothing of any resurrected physical body. This is our earliest and most authentic gospel of the resurrection.

Here are St. Paul's actual words which indicate what the word, resurrection, meant to him as recorded in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians: "Now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the first fruits of them that are asleep. . . . How are the dead raised? and with what manner of body do they come? Thou foolish one, that which thou thyself sowest is not quickened except it die . . . but God giveth it a body even as it pleased him and to each seed a body of its own. . . . So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. . . . Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual. . . . Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. . . . For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." ² As Lyman Abbott said once in an Easter sermon: "The resurrection of Jesus is not a unique event, it is rather the unique evidence of a natural event. Every death is a resurrection, if we were only spiritually attuned to realize it."

The next earliest Biblical account of the resurrection is largely missing. It originally formed the conclusion of Mark's Gospel but that original conclusion has mysteriously disappeared and what we have now, after the discovery of the

empty tomb recorded in Mark 16: 1-8, is a later substitution. This fact is recognized today by practically all competent New Testament scholars and is indicated in the American Standard Revised Version by a footnote and a blank space between verses 8 and 9 of Chapter 16. But, even in the substituted ending, there is no emphasis upon a re-animated body. It only says that he "appeared" or "was manifested" to various people and afterward "was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God." It does not say that anyone saw these two happenings as outward events in the physical world. The language is obviously figurative and spiritual.

It is in the later gospels, Luke and Matthew, both of them probably written after 85 A.D., or more than fifty years after the event, that legendary developments begin to appear—the angel at the tomb (Luke has two angels), the empty tomb itself and (in Matthew) the earthquake and the stunned guard of soldiers who are afterwards bribed by the priests to keep the resurrection quiet and spread the rumor that Jesus' disciples came and stole the body while they slept. Matthew prepares the scene for the ascension at "a mountain in Galilee" but does not actually describe it, but Luke describes it both in his gospel and in Acts, only he locates it definitely as occurring near Jerusalem, "over against Bethany." But in these gospels the appearances of Jesus are still of a deeply spiritual nature. Jesus' body, even if raised out of the tomb, is no ordinary fleshly body. It goes and comes without physical limitations, appearing now in Jerusalem, again on the Emmaus road or else in Galilee. As soon as the two on the Emmaus road, after walking with him without knowing him, finally recognized him in the breaking of bread that evening at their quiet country home, "he van-

ished out of their sight." Yet Luke also represents him as eating a piece of broiled fish and inviting them to see his hands and feet, "Handle me and see"!

It is in John, the latest of the gospels, written somewhere about 100 to 125 A.D., or at least seventy years or more after the event (almost as far as we are from the death of Lincoln), that the strongest emphasis on the re-animation of the body is to be found. Here Jesus definitely rebukes Thomas for doubting the fact of the resurrection and invites him to place his finger in the nail-prints and his hands in the spear-thrust wound in his side. But, even in John, the appearances of Jesus are not just commonplace encounters with a re-animated physical body. Mary Magdalene meets him but "knew not that it was Jesus," mistaking him for the gardener, and he forbids her to touch him. Of the group who ate breakfast with him beside the sea of Galilee it is said curiously that "none of the disciples durst inquire of him, Who art thou? Knowing that it was the Lord."

Now there is about all these resurrection narratives a beauty and an ethereal, haunting quality of mystery, which makes them the most enchanting and spiritually uplifting stories in the world. There is marvelous restraint and understatement, there is an utter carelessness about fitting them together into a faultless sequence and consistent historical pattern, and there is a sense that something was happening which was too wonderful and beautiful for human minds fully to understand or human words adequately to describe.

It is unfortunate that popular ideas about the resurrection have unconsciously developed so largely out of pictorial representations, often crudely physical and unhistorical, representing Jesus bursting the tomb asunder while the soldiers on guard are hurled to the ground as by a bomb explosion. "Now they will just have to believe in Jesus," the

artist seems to say. "See how he can burst open a rock-constructed tomb and knock down a company of soldiers! Pilate and Caiaphas will be sorry when they hear about this!"

But the resurrection as depicted in the New Testament is quite different. Jesus appears only to those who love him. But to them he appeared so vividly and convincingly that they felt as though they had actually seen his body once more, and then, again, they were not so sure. But one thing they were crystal clear about—they had heard his words. They were no new words, no additional beatitudes, no fresh parable, but words of responsibility and commission, laying upon their hearts the supreme duty of carrying on his message and his ministry. He never appeared to his enemies in the resurrection. He did not confront Caiaphas and say to him and his colleagues: "Well, here I am alive again, hale and hearty, ready to drive more money changers from the Temple." He never walked into Pilate's judgment hall to say: "Pilate, you failed! You thought you had killed me, but you didn't. I'm starting tomorrow on a greater preaching mission." No, to Pilate and Caiaphas and all the unbelieving multitudes he was dead, and remained dead. There were no resurrection appearances to them. Only to those who loved him, whose souls were attuned to his, did he appear and, "last of all, as to a child untimely born," to St. Paul.

But was it really "last of all"? Years ago in Honolulu, at a very impressive Easter sunrise service on Punch-bowl, a little extinct volcanic cone behind the town, I heard a speaker, a layman, of a rather fundamentalistic type of thought, utter these challenging words: "Jesus Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Have you seen him?" At the time, I was shocked. It seemed too crassly literalistic; but, as the years have gone by, I have been more and more im-

pressed. The resurrection experience, I now believe, was not just for the disciples in ancient Palestine. Something akin to it has been the heritage of Christian believers of the more mystical type all across the centuries. St. Francis of Assisi, St. Catherine of Siena, Brother Lawrence, John Fox, John Bunyan, William Blake, Francis Thompson, and an innumerable company of others have found Christ walking beside them on some Emmaus road or standing on the beach of their little lake of Galilee and have gone forth from the experience quickened in soul and reassured in spirit. If the resurrection is to have any great abiding value it must mean something to *us*.

The great thing about the religious experiences of the New Testament is that they are repeatable experiences. It would mean little to us to know or prove that Jesus once appeared to Peter or Mary Magdalene in the long ago. Interesting, but what of it? Only as we find him in some way present in our lives, guiding our decisions, reproving our hardness of heart, calling us to tend his sheep, reminding us of his sufferings, assuring us of his undying presence, do we reach out to him and cry: "My Lord and my God!"

It is highly important, therefore, that every Christian should believe in the resurrection. It surely took place, but just what took place is not easy to determine. But assuredly something happened which changed the early followers of Jesus from a disappointed band of defeated idealists into a compact disciplined body of convinced and determined missionaries. From being merely disciples they became apostles. A "disciple" is a "learner," but an "apostle" is a man who has learned and who has been "thrust forth" to become a missionary and a herald of the gospel. Now what was it that thrust them forth? They said that it was Jesus

and "the power of his resurrection." They were absolutely convinced that Jesus was not dead but alive and had commissioned them to carry his message to every land and every age. Something had happened which transformed them from cowards into heroes, from confused and baffled leaderless admirers of Jesus into a compact determined company of saints and martyrs who were ready to give their lives, if necessary, on the white sands of many a Roman amphitheater and struggle with paganism, immorality and cruelty until they conquered. What was it that effected so dramatic and marvelous a transformation? The resurrection!

The title of this chapter is "Three Views of the Resurrection." Against the background of what has been said thus far, let us now indicate these three possible views. One or the other of them is held by practically all Christians, and a man is free to choose as to which one he can give his wholehearted enthusiastic assent. These three views are the physical, the spiritual and the psychological.

1. *The physical interpretation of the resurrection*, the view of popular uncritical traditional "orthodoxy," is that Jesus' body was raised up by miraculous power, but also so changed in its nature, form and activities that it could appear and disappear when and where he chose, now being material, again so vaguely apprehended as not to be clearly recognized and finally ascending into heaven and disappearing in a cloud, accompanied by angels who promised that it would come back in the same manner. Millions believe this about Jesus. It is, of course, a conception quite impossible to men of modern scientific training; and, as we have seen, is a view that was probably quite unknown to the earliest Christians, like St. Paul. But if a man finds no difficulty in adjusting his mind to it, let him believe it. He believes in

the resurrection, and Jesus should be for him a vital authoritative influence in all his words and deeds—thereby making him a Christian.

2. *The spiritual interpretation of the resurrection.* This is the Pauline view, and will appeal to all who believe that there is some kind of reality behind what we call psychic phenomena today. This view is not much concerned about the physical body of Jesus, but inclines to interpret the resurrection appearances as spiritual manifestations by which the personality of Jesus made spiritual, non-corporeal contact with his disciples after his death, renewed their faith and courage, and convinced them that he was still alive. This view seems to the writer to entail fewer difficulties and to fit the facts more adequately than any other interpretation; but, of course, much will depend on one's own judgment and predispositions, or even prejudices, in the border-line realm of mystical and psychic experience.

3. *The psychological interpretation* is open to everyone and may be held either alone or in combination with either of the two previous views. It is that there was something about Jesus that could not die because it survived in compelling and irresistible fashion in the memories of the disciples. Wherever they went, the memory of Jesus went with them. In Jerusalem, in Galilee, on the Emmaus road, on the Bethany hillside, in the upper room—everywhere the words and deeds of Jesus came back to them. Three years of association with Jesus had "done something" to them. It was not until his physical presence was no longer with them that they realized how great this change had been. Then they found that they simply could not go back to their former lives. They no longer fitted into the old routine. They were like modern youths who, after three years in the army, have grown to be men and find they can no longer fit back into

the rather boyish immature civilian life of their High School days. What was it that changed everything? Jesus! They could not escape from him—his words, his value judgments, his challenge, his way of life. Being Orientals, imaginative, unscientific, unspoiled by modern psychologizing, there was just one explanation for them: Jesus had risen from the dead! He was with them still. Mary Magdalene knew it. Peter knew it. The two who had walked the Emmaus road knew it. Even Thomas discovered it was true.

Now I can understand this in part because of a very intimate personal experience. Years ago my father died. He and I had been close friends. He taught me how to swim, how to harness and drive a horse, how to do camp cooking and make a bed outdoors under the stars. Almost every night, for ten years, from the time I was six until I was sixteen, he read out-loud to me—all sorts of books from "Gulliver's Travels" and "Pilgrim's Progress" to Ridpath's "History of the World"—in six volumes. Then, when I was far away in school at Yale, he died. I remember sitting utterly forlorn on a bench on the New Haven green, thinking: "Well, probably after a while I'll gradually forget and not feel it so keenly." A few months, two years, went by. I graduated, was married, went abroad, was ordained and my first child was born. Then one day I suddenly awoke to a wonderful glad new feeling. I was no longer distressed over my father. I had not forgotten him. On the contrary, I was thinking of him frequently, of his early manhood, his marriage, his first child, his comments on life situations. But I was not thinking of him any more with grief, but with joy that I had had such a father. He no longer seemed dead. He was one of my permanent possessions. Then I read Phillips Brooks' word: "God never takes back his best gifts," and I knew it was so. My father had achieved a kind of resurrec-

tion. My relationship to him has been intimate, loving and grateful ever since.

Now the heart of the resurrection as a part of our personal Christian faith lies not in our accepting or rejecting any of the three possible interpretations given above. What our idea may be as to the real nature of the resurrection experiences as narrated in the New Testament is quite secondary. The important thing is this: Do we show with the disciples of old a sense of Jesus' continued comradeship and authority over our lives? Is he the shepherd and bishop of our souls? Do we bring all our decisions before the judgment seat of Christ? Is life illuminated for us by his example and transvalued by his values? Do we remember him and feel the power and comfort of his steadying influence in life's great or little crises? If so—then he is risen indeed, and we know it. The resurrection has become a fact of our experience. If not—well then the resurrection is just another outside fact to be discussed, like the probable appearance of the other side of the moon which we have never seen, but without any bearing on our lives. Only if he is risen *for us* has the resurrection become a glorious transforming reality.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHRIST OF FAITH AND OF THEOLOGY

The Christian religion exists upon two levels, the religion of Jesus, which we outlined in Chapter IV, and the religion about Jesus to which we must now turn our attention. No one can avoid these two aspects of Christianity and their inevitable interrelationship, though great danger comes from misplaced overemphasis on either. The extreme liberal, for instance, may say: "I have no concern about the religion which has grown up in subsequent ages about the figure of the Great Galilean. I am going straight back to Jesus and to him alone. Only what I find him believing, teaching and living has any authority for me."

Such an attempt to brush aside all subsequent Christian thought and return to the pristine purity of the great prophet of Galilee sounds both plausible and commendable. But as a matter of fact it can't be done and ought not to, if it could!

In the first place the man who announces such a purpose has himself set up, in very rudimentary form, his own religion about Jesus. It may be largely negative, but, so far as it is an acceptance, or even a rejection, of what Jesus taught, it is a value judgment about Jesus. He has only done, with severer limitations, what all Christian theologians in all the centuries have tried to do, namely, he has made up his mind as to the authority of Jesus and the nature of his personality.

In the second place, he does not see nor hear Jesus at first

hand but always through St. Paul or the authors of the gospels. The pane of glass through which he looks at Jesus is never clear plate-glass. It is always more or less colored by the ways of thinking and mental presuppositions of the practically unknown writers of the gospels. And, just as in all old glass, there are waves and variations of texture that somewhat blur and alter whatever we see through it, so here we are looking at Jesus through the primitive but beautiful crinkly glass of the ideas and assumptions of the early church. In other words, the religion about Jesus had already begun when the New Testament was written; and its authors lived and thought in a theological medium a little different from that in which Jesus himself lived and taught. The New Testament is more influenced by Greek thought, for example, than Jesus probably was.

And in the third place, a life so commanding and a message so transforming as were the life and message of Jesus are facts in religious history that cannot be ignored—and ought not to be. Any philosophy of a universe that produced Jesus must be comprehensive enough to include Jesus; and the moment we include him in our measurement of reality and our appraisal of values we have, whether we fully recognize it or not, set up for ourselves a religion about Jesus.

But, on the other hand, there is also danger in placing too exclusive an emphasis on the religion about Jesus. There are schools of Christian thought which pride themselves on their orthodoxy, or even on what is called in its most modern manifestation, neo-orthodoxy, (to say nothing of the crass fundamentalism that beats upon us so incessantly over the radio), which lay so much emphasis upon a particular interpretation of the religion about Jesus that they almost lose the Great Galilean out of the picture altogether.

On this very morning, as these words are being written,

I have been listening to a radio talk broadcast over a chain of stations by the pastor of a large church. He is strong on the second coming of Christ, but when answering the question, "Do the Lord's children suffer more than other people?" he said, in effect, "Certainly, because the Lord is disciplining them for eternal life, but he lets the others have a good time now because he knows that they will get their suffering in an eternity of rejection and hell!"

Such a failure to realize that Jesus announced universal moral laws and that all people face the same reactions in similar life situations, would hardly have been possible had the speaker known and revered the ethics of Jesus. Over and over again in history, down to this very hour, we see people who are strong in their emphasis upon a religion, often a very high religion, about Jesus but who seem to assume that this, in itself, is an adequate substitute for trying to live in the spirit in which Jesus lived. They weep at the cross—and turn to crucify their fellow men. They bow their heads in church whenever even the name of Jesus is mentioned, and then, out of church, look with scorn at all who do not follow with them in liturgical custom or theological formulation, forgetting what Jesus said to his disciples about other unknown disciples who operated independently.

John Calvin did not lack in emphasis upon the religion about Jesus. But it was his blind spot regarding the religion of Jesus that made it possible for him to consent to the burning of Servetus at the stake. Archbishop Laud, who persecuted our Pilgrim Fathers, was probably orthodox in his Christology but apparently had never read the Sermon on the Mount and did not care much about the Beatitudes! The same might be said of Torquemada or of the New England puritans who persecuted Roger Williams and the Quakers.

All this, however, should not prejudice us against the re-

ligion about Jesus. It grew up and has survived not because of the harshness, dogmatism and unloveable qualities of its unbalanced protagonists but in spite of them. Orthodoxy need not be equated with censoriousness, nor a high Christology with heartlessness and pride. It should be remembered that when the religion about Jesus is associated in proper balance with the religion of Jesus you have Christianity in its finest flower: witness St. Francis of Assisi, Brother Lawrence, "The Imitation of Christ," Erasmus, Sir Thomas More, John Fox and William Penn, John Friedrich Oberlin, Alfred Tennyson, David Livingstone, William Booth, Henry Drummond, Walter Rauschenbusch, Wilfred Grenfell, Albert Schweitzer and a host of others.

What, then, is the religion about Jesus and how did it grow up?

It began, undoubtedly, as we have seen in the last chapter, with the resurrection. However one may interpret the resurrection appearances, it is clear that after the crucifixion the disciples had to look at Jesus from a new perspective. They had to make up their minds and determine their loyalties both to his teachings and to him as a person.

They had apparently already come to the conclusion that Jesus was the Messiah. That word means the Anointed One. The equivalent word in Greek is *Christos*. It refers to the Hebrew custom of dedication to some high and special task by a ceremony of pouring oil upon the head. Out of defeat and tribulation the Jewish people had come with what we call a messianic hope. In spite of all that had happened to them, they were not utterly crushed but were upheld by a faith that, in due time, God would save and renew them through the coming of a great divinely credentialed leader or at least a divinely ordered age. The messianic hope was not always personal; and, in any case, it involved a redeemed

community, what Jesus called "The Kingdom of God." Scholars are not clear as to just when or how completely Jesus accepted this role of Messiah for himself or announced it to his followers. He could hardly escape the idea, and he seems to have labored hard to remove from it the false and fantastic decorative trimmings which current popular thought had connected with it. He was continually interpreting the Kingdom of God, not in terms of miraculous militarism or external supernaturalism, but in terms of universal principles, deep-seated ethical laws, overarching Divine love, human responsibility, good will and common sense. He was certainly too much the child of his own age to ignore the messianic idea, and he was too wise a teacher not to use the thought forms people around him accepted and understood. But that he was critical of popular conceptions and sought to purify and transfigure them, giving them deeper ethical content, seems apparent on almost every page of the four gospels as well as in the unsigned reflected gospel which we find in the writings of St. Paul.

Now the religion about Jesus became a public challenge when, under the influence of the resurrection, his disciples came out flatly proclaiming "that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified."¹ Having proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah the early disciples were driven back into the Old Testament to see what sort of person the Messiah should really be and were greatly reinforced by certain passages in the Psalms and the Prophets, especially the picture of the Suffering Servant of the Lord in Isaiah.² Inevitably these scriptures influenced their conception of Christ. The development of a Christology had begun!

Almost immediately this challenge had to be met: "If Jesus is the messianic king who is to deliver Israel, how does it come that he has died a shameful death upon the cross, and

how can a dead and discredited Messiah save Israel?" The answer was that all this did not discredit him. His sufferings had been foreseen and foreshadowed in the twenty-second Psalm and in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. He suffered and died in fulfillment of prophecy and he would yet come in power and fulfill his ministry as Messiah by setting up his kingdom on the earth.

Many of us today would not express it in those terms. We, too, are children of a particular age and have to speak a language that is meaningful and appealing to our day. But we do believe that the principles Jesus gave us and the interpretation of life he exemplified are so true and inevitable, so geared into the moral nature of the universe, that he is the Savior of the world; and that only through acceptance of his philosophy and obedience to his teachings and example can men dwell in peace or the race go forward to fulfill its highest possibilities. So we still have our messianic hope and Jesus is our Messiah, our Christ. And the words of the Old Testament in the great passages which meant so much to the early Christians are eternally true. They were true of the dim unknown figures concerning whom they were first written; they were true of Jesus, as the early Christians saw so clearly; and they are still true of all noble and Christ-like souls who share in the messianic task of the redemption not only of Israel but of all the world.

Out of this question about the suffering and death of Jesus has come also the great Christian doctrine of the atonement—a doctrine that has sometimes assumed grotesque and repulsive forms. Not satisfied with the explanation that Jesus' sufferings were in accordance with prophecy, or were, as we would say, the price of heroic leadership, the thinkers of a less inspired age conceived of them as a ransom paid by God to the devil to redeem humanity from his

power. Later thinkers said they were in payment of the penalty for sin, Adam's sin and that of all the world, exacted not by the devil but by God's own sense of justice. Yet others have repudiated such a legalistic view but have pointed out the moral influence of Jesus' sufferings. They did not pay a debt owed to God, or provide satisfaction for God's inexorable sense of justice so much as they revealed the love of God as one who suffers with and for his children, and rebuked men for their treatment of the most beautiful and God-like soul the world had ever known. Others have found in the cross a symbol of the tragic mystery of suffering—a tragedy and a mystery at the heart of the universe, revealed all the more poignantly by so great and pure a soul as Jesus but accepted and overcome by him through faith.

Whatever theory of the atonement one may find acceptable to his thinking, the cross will always be central in Christian thought. We cannot escape either the challenge of suffering in our own lives, or the memory that Jesus himself was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,"³ and yet at the same time not a defeated or broken-hearted man but, in spite of all, one who says to all the ages, in the language of the Fourth Gospel: "In the world ye shall have tribulation. Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."⁴ That is what the cross on every altar and on every church steeple in Christendom ought to say to thoughtful men and women.

As men meditated upon the teachings of Jesus and tried to follow his example, as they considered his sufferings and the wonder of his resurrection, as they experienced his transforming power over their lives and found themselves closer to God through him, there grew up an ever deepening conviction of his divinity. Although other Christians probably came to much the same feeling about our Lord, it was St.

Paul who left in clearest form his reasoned convictions about Jesus; namely, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself," ⁵ and also that "God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." ⁶ As one reads the following passage from the letter to the Colossians one feels that Paul is finding language quite inadequate to express his exalted view of Jesus: ⁷

"Giving thanks unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the son of his love; in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins: who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him and unto him; and he is before all things, and in him all things consist (or hold together). For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fulness dwell; and through him to reconcile all things unto himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross: through him I say, whether things upon the earth or things in heaven." It is a poetic rhapsody. Language cannot go much further.

The author of the Fourth Gospel says much the same thing, only a little more precisely by identifying Jesus with the Logos, or the divine Word, by which, in the popular philosophical thought of that day, God had created the world.⁸ There is no formal statement of the doctrine of the

Trinity in the New Testament, but all the elements for it are already in operation: a recognition of God, the Father; an exaltation of Jesus as the incarnation of God; and a feeling of the continued inspirational presence of God's spirit in the lives of believers. Given these things, some doctrine of the Trinity was inevitable.

Some carried this Christ mysticism to such extremes that they believed the divine nature was imparted to Jesus at his baptism and withdrawn upon the cross. This the church ultimately repudiated as heresy, teaching that the two natures, human and divine were never separated.

Now what meaning, value and authority has all this for modern men? "Not much," some will answer. "We think in such different terms and live in such a divergent universe of discourse that this is largely outmoded theological jargon to all except ministers and theologians."

But I think we shall not so easily escape from the doctrine of the divinity of Christ. To be sure, we are less graphic and less assured in our conception of what might be called "the anatomy of God" than were the men of olden times, but we do find God at work in the world. And we also confront, as they did, the fact of Christ—not only the historical fact but the present immediate fact of our own personal experience with Jesus. We know even as was said of old, that "man never so spake."⁹ After all our fumbling, we stand wonderingly and reverently before the way he played the game of life. In times of crisis and tragedy, we turn to him for light upon our darkened paths and find both wisdom and comfort in his words and his example. We find nothing in him for which we need to apologize, and we are continually made humble in his presence. Perhaps this is our way of discovering, out of the real experience of our day, that God, who has revealed himself to us on so many levels, did at last,

on the human level, reveal himself to us supremely in Jesus Christ. It seems to me that Tennyson summed it up for us when he said:

Thou seemest human and divine:
Our highest holiest manhood thou;
Our wills are ours, we know not how,
Our wills are ours to make them thine.¹⁰

That is not exactly the language of St. Paul, but it comes out of the same kind of experience as St. Paul's language came, and it means the same thing in terms that a modern man can accept and understand.

After all, must not each age create its own appealing and authoritative conception of Christ? Can it ever be merely a superimposed legalistic formula in the language of some other age if it is to have vitality and power? A doctrine of the divinity of Christ to be meaningful and authoritative for us must come out of our experience with Christ today even as that of the men of long ago came out of their experience with him yesterday. New faith in Christ will not arise from a mere revamping of ancient doctrines, and certainly not from insistence upon our accepting and using the language in which those doctrines were expressed but from which the meaning has largely evaporated. It can only come out of a fresh contemporary conviction of the validity and necessity of Christ for us in the solving of our problems.

Go out into this modern world and try to live according to the spirit of Christ. You will return either a cynic and a defeated soul or you will come back with a reverence for him equal to that of Paul or John, though quite probably expressed in different phraseology. This age needs desperately a religion about Jesus, but it must be about a Jesus whom we have experienced. No merely inherited theories

about Jesus, no matter how respectable or orthodox, will save the world. They are relatively unimportant except as records of historical development. But if a man has committed himself to live a Christlike life—then Jesus will become for him something so high and holy that all the creeds in Christendom cannot adequately express his reverence and loyalty. He will write his own creed, for he will find in Christ both his human ideal and his ultimate insight into the profoundest things in life, into the nature of the universe itself. Christ will thus become for him his supreme revelation of God, his open door into the heart of the eternal mystery in the presence of which we live our human lives. Without some clue to life's meaning, some focus for our faith, some concrete incarnation of ultimate truth for our guidance and our adoration, we would be lost souls, forlorn and miserable. Christ is the one, as an ancient saint has said, who "turns all our sunsets into dawn!"

Subtlest thought may fail and learning falter,
Creeds change, forms perish, systems go:
But our human needs—they will not alter;
Christ no after age shall e'er out-grow.¹¹

CHAPTER VIII

SINS, SORROWS AND SUCCESSES OF THE CHURCH

All social institutions are up for reappraisal today. Capitalism, communism, cooperatives, labor unions, democracy, fascism, the home, the school, the church: all pass in review.

There is danger that the church may suffer in this fiery test of scrutiny and criticism both because of its blind devotees and its equally blind denouncers. The devotees deceive themselves and may befuddle the church by lifting up the dogma that the church is a divine institution and therefore above the ebb and flow of human affairs. This renewed emphasis upon the church as a divine institution has both values and perils. So far as it adds dignity and a sense of permanence and stability to the church, it is good. But the danger is that churchmen will tend to equate the divinity within the church with those particular aspects of the church which they like or profit from and forget that there are many human as well as divine elements within the church. Humanity is apt to become as impatient with claims for the divine right of churches as with the divine right of kings.

A divine institution is a dangerous thing to have around, even for its own custodians, as the keepers of Israel's sacred ark learned long ago.¹ And if we say that the church is a divine institution we had better think through pretty carefully what we mean by such a formula. In what ways is it

any more divine than the home, the school, the social order? Does God love it more? Does he give it an infallibility withheld from them? Has it the right to claim any special prerogatives because of its divine origin and nature? Just what do you mean by "divine," anyway? This pragmatic and practical generation is apt to say to those who take refuge in some theory of the divinity of the church what the prophet said to ancient Israel: "If thou be a great people, get thee up into the forest and cut down for thyself." ² Unless the church can really hew something down in this modern world, theories of divine origin will not seem very important and the church will drift into that pathetic backwater which Rabbi Abba Silver has called "pious irrelevancy."

When we speak of the church as a divine institution, therefore, let us make it clear that we do not mean that it claims any infallibility or external authority or special privileges or governmental favors. Nor should it feel itself to be the object of a special divine solicitude that makes it the favorite child of the Almighty, a sort of Joseph with his coat of many colors amid its more drab and less favored brethren, the home and the school, the labor union, the cooperative or the government. All of them are divinely ordered of God when they obey his laws and carry out his purposes. And, by the same token, none of them are divine when they don't—not even the church!

On the other hand, the church is divine when it does divine things. When it brings men close to Christ who was its founder, when it teaches men the beauty of holiness and leads them into the mystery of worship, when it speaks in prophetic tones against inhumanity and the pride and the conceit of men, when it hands down the sacred tradition of all that is best out of the past and humbly confesses its own sins and makes amends for them—then, and then

only, is the church divine, for then it is doing divine things. But if it does such things it will not need to worry about proclaiming its own divine origin. Men will recognize it and honor it without any dogma being imposed upon them.

But, if the church is in danger from its devotees, it also suffers from its detractors. There are always people who remember all its sins and forget its services, denounce its vices and ignore its virtues. It must always be remembered that the sins and sorrows of the church have been the sins and sorrows of the age in which it lived. No matter how divine a commission it held, or how spiritual its purposes, it has always had to operate through fallible human agents whose thoughts and actions were inevitably colored by the moral and intellectual atmosphere of the age that gave them birth.

The measure of the church is not its sinlessness but its capacity to feel the stirrings of conscience against all sins, and its awakening to lead the way to their repudiation. The glory of the church is that, although it produced a Peter the Hermit to set the world aflame with the Crusades, it also produced a St. Francis to heal men's wounds. Over against the Bishop of Beauvais stands Joan of Arc. Over against Torquemada stands John Fox; over against Archbishop Laud, the Pilgrim Fathers. Over against those who killed the Indians stand John Eliot who gave them the Bible and William Penn, who gave them justice and honor; over against the fox-hunting, worldly clerics of the eighteenth century, John Wesley; over against—but perhaps it would not be safe to be more modern!

Suffice it to say that the church, like every other institution, has a right to be judged by its best while not escaping condemnation for its worst. It is divine insofar as it has

incarnated the conscience of mankind and has thus been a trumpet call for the righteousness of God.

But perhaps, instead of theorizing about the church, it may be more profitable to take a few glimpses at her history. The best picture we have of the early church is the New Testament itself. Whatever difficulties men have, or think they have, in getting back to Christ, there is no trouble about getting back to the New Testament! There it is—all written between 50 and 150 A.D.—a picture of the primitive Christian Church: what it believed, who composed it, what its problems were, how it was organized, what it sought to do, with what spirit it met the world. To study and revere this picture is not to make an idol of it, or say that church was perfect and nothing about it could be changed, altered or improved across the centuries. To take such a view would be to deny the fact of growth and the guidance of the Holy Spirit into larger truth. Our Pilgrim Fathers believed in 1620 that "The Lord hath more truth and light yet to break forth unto us out of his holy Word,"³ and we should not be less progressive than John Robinson and William Bradford.

To sum up the New Testament in a paragraph or so is not easy but it becomes very impressive. The church we see behind this precious collection of letters, memoirs and essays was made up of humble people unimportant from a worldly standpoint, who were bound together into an intensely loyal community by certain things which they believed. Among these were faith in God, a supreme loyalty to Jesus, whom they regarded as the Messiah and the Son of God, and a sensitivity to the inner light, a conviction of the Holy Spirit of God speaking directly to their inmost souls. They looked for the quick return of Jesus, probably in their own lifetimes, to set up his Kingdom. In the meantime they felt that

they must live pure, humble, devout lives, abstaining from the heathenism round about them, from drunkenness and sensuality, from greed and exploitation, from hatred, idolatry, and war.

Toward the achievement of these ends they were organized in groups called churches which met on the first day of the week in private homes, which, in Mediterranean countries, often had spacious court-yards adaptable for such gatherings. The Greek word for church was *ecclesia* which meant "called out." They felt that God had called them out of the wicked ruthless pagan civilization around about them to get ready for the Kingdom of God. Their meetings were very informal. They read the Old Testament and certain writings of their own, sang the Psalms, and listened to the "prophets" who were simply fellow Christians, often visitors, who had a concern or bore a testimony or expressed an inspiring conviction about religion. After this or before it they ate a "pot-luck" supper together which they called an "*agape*" or "love feast." At the close of this, all left who were not baptized members. The phrase of dismissal may have been: "*Itē, missa est*," which meant, "you may go now, the public meeting is dismissed." From this arose possibly the term "mass" as applicable to the more formal and yet very simple observance of the Lord's Supper which followed.

By way of organization they had deacons, elders, and bishops. The deacons had charge of their simple arrangements for social security through alms for widows and orphans. The elders, like the elders in the synagogue, had charge of the services of worship and were, in general, the leaders of the church community. The Greek word for elder was "*presbuteros*"—out of which comes our adjective, presbyterian, for a church governed by elders; and, curiously

enough, priest, which is only a shortened English form of the word presbyter! The Greek clubs of the day had managers called "*episcopoi*." The word meant "overseer"; and, eventually, the leading presbyter or elder in each city came to be known as the *episcopos*, the English form of which is bishop.

It is a thrilling story of how this movement, largely underground, often hideously persecuted, gradually permeated and ultimately won recognition and tolerance, and at last, tragically some feel, gained official adoption by pagan Rome. These early Christians won out because of their character, their convictions, their devotion to Christ, their intense loyalty to one another through the beloved community of the church and by the heroism of their martyrs.

Christianity having achieved at last a recognized place as the official church, great changes now set in. These changes had, some of them, already been in process of formation but they now became accentuated and accelerated. The post-Constantine Christians developed a more formal and elaborate theology, ritual and church organization, taking over some of the forms and ceremonies of the pagan religion which they had conquered, doubtless influenced by the popular "mystery" religions⁴ which were the chief competitors of Christianity. Doctrines developed such as those of transubstantiation, the trinity and the adoration of the saints and of the Virgin Mary. The ritual of worship, especially the words and ceremonies in the mass, became rigidly prescribed. With the fall of Rome before the barbarians and with the assumption of western church leadership by the Bishop of Rome there came the rise of the papacy. The transition into the medieval Catholic Church was well underway.

The medieval church and its achievements usually suffer

from lack of appreciation by Protestants. To be sure the Crusades were unspeakably cruel and stupid and the everlasting struggle between Pope and Emperor makes dull reading. Monasticism is not much to our liking and the theological quarrels of the scholastics have no thrill for us today. But we must remember, nevertheless, that this age of the church gave us the great cathedrals and prepared the way for Giotto and Dante. It produced heroic Christian figures from Augustine and Gregory the Great to Francis of Assisi and Bernard of Clairvaux. Thomas Aquinas still influences the world with his thinking, and Joan of Arc, completely medieval though she was, appeals to such ultra-moderns as Mark Twain and Bernard Shaw.

But this medieval church came to an end in the Renaissance and Reformation, and Christianity divided into its two main streams of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Great figures emerged out of the struggle. Wyclif and Huss, as precursors of the reformation, and then Savonarola, Luther, Erasmus, Zwingli, Calvin, and John Knox, to name only a few. Much that they contended over seems to most of us today unprofitable verbalism and unprovable dogmatism far removed from the gospel of Jesus or the real issues of life. But out of these things, almost as a by-product of the times, we can see emerging a new sense of personal values, an emphasis on human dignity, democracy and the rights of man which led at last to the abolition of slavery, the emancipation of women, the public school, collective bargaining for labor and that awakened contemporary social conscience which cannot rest until racial discriminations are overcome and wars shall cease.

Today may well mark the beginning of a new era for the Christian Church. She faces devastating sins and ruthless foes. The whole social application of her gospel is chal-

lenged by the secularism, cynicism and materialism of the modern world. She conquered ancient Roman paganism but is menaced today by a neo-paganism more subtle but no less deadly than that of old. Because men wear modern clothing and use up-to-date inventions and conveniences, because they date their letters by the Christian era, and indeed may consider themselves Christians and hold membership in respectable churches, it does not necessarily follow that they are really Christians. Pagans conforming outwardly to Christian rites, and even using Christian language, are even more dangerous than were pagans who knew themselves, and were known by all, to be pagans. How to meet and overcome modern paganism is the supreme task of the church today.

This modern paganism has three outstanding characteristics: ✓

1. *It ignores God.* For all practical purposes it has taken God to the confines of the universe and bowed him out. In place of God it has set up a blind mechanical depersonalized conception of the universe which it imagines is justified by modern science. This universe it proposes to exploit to the limit, inventing and discovering all the new powers which can be wrested from nature, like the atomic bomb, and manipulated by men according to their own desires. All this,—with a curious lack of reverence for the wonders which are thus exploited, and apparently without the slightest understanding that this universe so ruthlessly and selfishly appropriated is what Goethe called “the living garment of God”; and that, behind it and moving through it, there may be moral and spiritual as well as physical and chemical laws; and that it should, therefore, be approached with reverence and with awe. Against this basic sin of our pagan or at least sub-Christian civilization the church has got to awaken the con-

sciences of men. Somehow we must say to the world: "God lives! He is not a tool for your convenience, or a mere source of luxury and sensuous pleasure. Be hushed and reverent and worship him."

2. *It ignores Jesus.* It is indifferent to theologies about Jesus, high or low, simple or profound. It is quite willing that men should believe and say anything about Jesus that they wish. But it has no idea that Jesus can possibly be relevant to life today. It would never say with Julian the Apostate: "Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean, and the world has grown grey at thy touch."⁵ As a matter of fact, though it still regards Jesus as a "pale Galilean," it feels he just doesn't touch the world at all. It doesn't bother to crucify Jesus. It just "leaves him in the rain" as Studdert Kennedy said in his poignant poem: "When Jesus Came to Birmingham." It holds that while Jesus may have said, "Love your enemies," everybody knows that is just sentimental twaddle; and that while he may have declared, "They that take the sword shall perish by the sword,"⁶ every practical man today understands that we must be armed to the teeth. Although, of course, Jesus probably did speak in praise of the modest and humble and suggest taking the lower seat at the banquet table, and although sometimes that may be mighty clever strategy, nevertheless, in the end, a man must know what he wants and go after it. It's results that count and if you are too squeamish about the means you employ you won't get there. Of course it is well to be "law honest," and ordinary Christian moral standards help to keep the masses in order (religion is a useful opiate of the people at times), but when it comes to a real fight, whether in battle or in business or over a woman, you discard Jesus and obey your instincts. These statements don't need to be documented. But if you think they do, read Hitler and Mussolini—yes and

read some people much nearer home or talk on a man-to-man level with some of the hard-boiled, realistic, cynical "he-men" of your own community.

3. *It has no sense of sin.* This doesn't mean that it escapes the punishment of sin or never suffers from feelings of guilt and remorse, but these things have no proper recognition in its philosophy and, when they come, are looked upon as aberrations or unfortunate slumps back into weaknesses that ought to have been outgrown. Modern paganism has no place for the moral law and flouts all conventional standards of ethical behavior. Oh, not too openly. We are not yet quite brazen enough to refuse at least lip service to morality. But back of much that passes for modern civilization there is a disregard of high principles and standards that reveals the essentially anti-moral quality of contemporary paganism. Take advertising for instance. How honest is it, how sincere? Do the purring voiced radio announcers believe the things they say? Do the makers of the articles advertised with such polished blandishment believe what is said about them? Take the race problem. How many people in the United States actually feel that the Negro, as a human being, is worthy of an equal opportunity for education, for vocational choice, for good housing with every other human being? On the other hand, how many more or less articulately assume that "the nigger should be kept in his place"—that place being one of marked inferiority in all the respects noted above.

Such is a partial sketch of modern paganism. To deal with it is the challenge which confronts the church today. Unless it does so the church is evading its task and will not long endure except as an irrelevant side-issue about as vitally important as stamp-collecting or playing chess or cultivating mushrooms—all of which are innocent enough activities

and have their devotees. This roaring pagan world about us is not going to pay the slightest attention to what the church calls heresy or orthodoxy, or even neo-orthodoxy. It is willing to let people who want to do so believe or disbelieve any doctrines they choose and observe or neglect any sacraments, rituals or mystical rites they wish to. They can call themselves modernists or fundamentalists, high churchmen or low, Anglo-Catholics or Unitarians, Wiemanites, Niebuhrians, Barthians—or Bahaiists. The world is supremely indifferent to such distinctions and views them with an amused or else a totally uncomprehending tolerance.

But, if the church goes out and recognizes our modern paganism for what it is and takes adequate steps against it, she will be neither tolerated nor ignored. That means preaching the reality and character of God with a power and conviction that cannot be forgotten. It means confronting the world with Christ as the one possible solution to its ills, and seriously proposing obedience to what he taught not mere acquiescence in doctrines about his person. It means a new puritanism in daily life and a bringing of the social order, all business affairs, economic policies, race relationships, and programs for war and peace, before the judgment seat of Christ.

Such is the challenge that confronts the modern church. It will take brave hearts and intelligent, devoted leadership. Has the church the insight, the faith, the man power to face the modern world? If she has, she will be a divine institution—but not otherwise.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT'S RIGHT AND WRONG—AND WHY?

In Robert Frost's poem "Mending Wall" two sides of human nature are admirably expressed. One is the side of freedom. "Something there is that doesn't love a wall." But the other is the side of legislation, that wants the rules strictly defined and observed. "Good fences make good neighbors." And so Robert Frost and his farmer neighbor work together, in the spring, mending the line wall between them that is forever being tumbled down by the upheavals of winter or the depredations of marauding hunters. Robert Frost is philosophical about it, he doesn't like walls, wants them down.¹

"Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out."

But his farmer neighbor is a legalist, grimly insisting on the law, concerned about his code and its enforcement:

"He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of the woods alone and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well.
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

The world owes much to its wall builders. Moses, Nehemiah, Romulus, Justinian, Athanasius, St. Thomas Aquinas, Calvin, Hamilton, and all the rest who have loved to codify

the laws of God and man. But always they are plagued and troubled by the freer spirits who disturb their neatly systematized schemes and break down the wall of tradition, precedent and unyielding authority. In the long run we owe much to the heretics and rebels also, the disturbers of established customs, the yeasty leaven in the soggy lump of inherited conservatism. The great non-conformists, Amos, Socrates, Jeremiah, Luther, Copernicus, Jefferson, Darwin, to come no further down into the arena of modern life, also have a necessary function to fulfill if human life and thought are not to stagnate in some lesser good.

Just now we are in a painful period of transition in our conceptions of what is right and what is wrong and why. Hitherto the wall builders have had the best of the situation, at least in theory. They claimed for their walls or codes a divine and absolute authority. What they considered Christian moral standards seemed to them to be built upon what they called "the impregnable rock of Holy Scripture." Gladstone wrote a book on that subject. If you want to know what's right or wrong, says traditional morality, go to the Bible. There is a book dictated by the Holy Spirit. It is the Word of God. It has all the answers. It's just a matter of correct legal interpretation of the code. Make your own interpretation, but you do it at your peril. It's safer to follow the interpretation of your church, or, in actual practice, the diluted and adjusted version of the code to be found in the customs of your community. Be at least "law honest" or "as good as the average" and you will probably get by. If you are a sensitive soul, like St. Paul or St. Augustine, you will probably find you are a great sinner. But don't let that trouble you too greatly. There is a way out. The blood of Christ will hide your sins from God. He will accept you, if you belong to the elect, and save you to everlasting felicity

in heaven. Something approximating this solution to life's ethical problems is widely prevalent, even today.

But for many all this has lost, for better or worse, its authority and its appeal. The upheaving frosts of modern science and critical scholarship have tumbled and broken down this neat authoritative code and the wild hunters of war and greed and economic exploitation, of lust and drunkenness and violence, have scattered its stones and ridden rough-shod over the boundary lines it attempted to mark between the evil and the good.

As a result many people, and some of them pretty important people, leaders in human affairs, scientists, statesmen, novelists, teachers, social workers, are living today in a state of moral anarchy. Either they just drift along, following from inertia or fear of change a moral code inherited from the past, or else they steer blindly through the darkness, guided only by the false lights of self-will and temporary expediency or, at best, a reliance on majority votes, like the mountain schoolmaster who was prepared to teach that the world was round or flat according to the desires of the school board. No wonder there is a cry for a code which can be respected and enforced and for a stiffening of the moral backbone of the world.

Some would meet this urgent need by beating a retreat into the past. "Tenting tonight on the old camp-ground" is their theme song. The clinical psychologist would say that they gain a sense of security by going back to the positions of yesterday. Someone has observed that they also find many camp followers, laggards and deserters ready to rally round the camp-fires of yesterday. And so they say: "What the modern world needs is authority. The Bible is the Word of God. Preach the word!"

But this is an impossible solution for the really progres-

sive thinking of the human race, and a church which takes this stand will lose all contact with the head of the column. It will waste its strength fighting hopeless rear-guard actions when it ought to be out ahead exploring new territory. Modern critical scholarship has proved beyond any possibility of its being refuted that the Bible is not a superhuman, miraculous, divinely dictated, infallible code but rather that it is the record of a great human struggle to understand the ways of God, a series of tremendously important experiences on different levels by which the human spirit, under the leaderships of prophets, poets and apostles, has reached out toward truth. But, since the truth they saw came to them through different windows and in different ages, we still have to evaluate it. And no one, whatever his theory about the Bible, can escape making choices between the moral standards of those parts of the Old Testament which complacently accept child-sacrifice, polygamy, discrimination against foreigners and wild savagery in battle and the far nobler ethics of Christ and the New Testament.

So someone says: "Very well, let's discard most of the Old Testament, except the Prophets and certain of the Psalms, and make our code out of the teaching of Jesus and the New Testament." And this seems like a relatively easy rule-of-thumb solution.

But the attempt to do this at once encounters three difficulties:

1. First of all, there are moral and ethical situations which were non-existent in the first century and to which the code would not easily apply. Jesus never went through a modern war, never faced a revolutionary discovery like the atomic bomb with all the problems that it raises, knew nothing of the international tangles amid which we are now gasping for breath.

2. Jesus never meant his teachings to be used as a rigid

legal code. What he said was commentary, not legislation. When you approach Jesus in a legalistic spirit, you lose the prophet and the poet that were in him.

3. And, most staggering of all to modern minds, you still have to face the major moral question of our age: How can you prove that Jesus was right? How do you know that the Christian code which seems to be, in embryo at least, latent within the New Testament will not also pass away and become as out-of-date as the cruel laws of the Aztecs or the strange unreasonable taboos of Polynesian islanders?

And our answer to this master question had better be a modest one—all the more convincing to the people whom it is most important to convince, if it is modest. That answer is: We do not know absolutely, but we do have a reasonable faith. Life is not run largely on absolute knowledge. Many of its greatest decisions and most perilous investments have to be made on faith—faith in the integrity of the universe, faith in human character, faith in moral values and codes of conduct. But it must be a reasonable faith, not just a wishful phantasy or arbitrary whim.

We must build our faith as to what is right or wrong out of our experience with life, just as we build our faith in the existence of God himself. Only it must be not only our own personal experience but also that of all other men, especially as recorded in history and in the Scriptures. We must begin with ourselves. What is right and wrong for the individual will seem to be determined by the voice of conscience. This strange spark of the divine within us must not be extinguished or disregarded. When we do what conscience says is right, no matter how hard, we experience an inward peace and serenity. We are in harmony with ourselves and all is well. But is it? What about John Bowring's conscience which purred with comfort when he wrote: "In the cross of

Christ I glory," and never reproached him for being a slave trader? No, while conscience must be obeyed, it must also be educated and enlightened.

To become educated and enlightened, a man's conscience must get out of the comfortable garden path of self and walk with other human souls along the great highway of life. Eventually the discovery will be made: that is not good for me which is not also good for others. I have responsibilities to others—to my family, to my community, to my day and generation and to posterity. That is good which has survival value, which increases human well-being, intelligence and progress. That is bad which weakens and destroys my fellow men. These are the yard-sticks which thoughtful men actually employ and, out of their judgments, based on such experience, inevitably and sometimes quite unconsciously arise the codes by which they run their lives. They may attribute them to the gods, but they would never have been accepted if they had not seemed to meet the pragmatic test.

The trouble with these yard-sticks is that they are often too short. Try to measure a ship by a yard-stick. For many yards, you will say that a ship is built on straight lines. You have to go many a yard from your position amidship before you come to the pointed bow or the rounded stern. And so it is in moral judgments. "There is a way that may seem right to a man; but the ends thereof are the ways of death." Adultery may seem right to the man who consults only his own pleasure; but, when measured by the yard-stick of the family and by the judgment of the years, adultery means tragedy to children, and disintegration of the home, which is the basic cell in our whole social structure. It also means a loss to the individual of something fine and precious which can grow only in an atmosphere of fidelity

and trust. But it may take years to reveal all this to any one individual. Hence no man can make his own moral code out of the pleasure, passion or superficial judgment of the moment. He must consider the life experience of other men, he must listen to the ages. This is the basic moral fact out of which all the codes are born.

But someone says: "Don't you make any place at all for divine revelation? Has not God told man anything about right and wrong? Hasn't God revealed his moral standards?" And my answer is God reveals himself through human experience. How else would or could he reveal himself concerning human interests and values except through human life itself? God's revelation is all about us, in the facts of the physical universe up to a certain level but, beyond that, in the facts of human life. Surely we don't expect to find a book of golden tablets written in "reformed Egyptian" by the finger of God such as Joseph Smith claimed he found in the hill of Cumorah and translated into the Book of Mormon.² No! God writes his revelation on the tablets of the human heart. That it is his revelation is proved by the test of life experience, sometimes over centuries. "Believe not every spirit," it says in the New Testament, "but prove the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."³ Jesus himself said: "It was said to you of old time . . ." (and right in the Bible too) thus and so; "but I say unto you" . . . something quite different, sterner and more exacting. How do men find out that Jesus was right? Only by the experience of life.

Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes put it in contemporary language when he said: "When men have realized that time has upset many fighting faiths they may come to believe even more than they believe the very foundations of their own conduct that the good desired is better

reached by free trade in ideas—that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground on which their wishes safely can be carried out.”⁴

There is an authentic moral code! Morality is not an outgrown myth, a superstition which can safely be discarded by “emancipated” sophisticates: “Do what you like! Express yourself! Follow your instincts!” These are the trite and trivial shibboleths of a passing vogue. Neither is morality a mere matter of geography or mores or temporary expediency, a mere relativism eternally shifting with circumstances, as though one could say: “In one age and country polygamy is moral, in another it is immoral.” “Some civilizations condemn suicide, others surround it with honor.” Morality is conformity to the will of God. It is, therefore, the highest, the ultimate expediency. If moral practices vary from age to age, it is not because God’s will has changed but because human understanding of God’s will and man’s ability to practice it, have been faulty or incomplete. We know now that slavery is wrong and that polygamy is wrong. We know this not because they are denounced in the Bible—they are not. We know it because the test of life itself has proved them detrimental to the race.

This moral code is still developing. Its growing edge just now is in the area of war, economic life and race relations. The human race, by the hard stern method of trial and error, is engaged in putting questions to the universe, and that means to God, about these matters. And God is answering by revealing to us the terror, futility and awful reactions, psychological and economic, that come from war. Tomorrow, unless we learn our lesson quickly, we may have to be taught the even more terrible price we shall pay if we continue tolerating economic exploitation of the weak

by the strong. We may then have to go on and learn "line upon line and precept upon precept" the devastating results of racial prejudice and discrimination.

If morality is conformity to the will of God, then sin is the violation or defiance of God's will. Sin may be either conscious or unconscious, but in either case it meets with penalty. Conscious sin may be repented of and, when it is replaced by obedience, penalty is replaced by harmony and peace; though, as the poet has said:

Wounds of the soul, though healed, will ache;
The scars remain to make confession.⁵

But sin that is never repented of goes on sowing and reaping its terrible harvest of penalty. Many slave-holders were not conscious sinners in that respect. With a good conscience they believed God had ordained slavery and that the Bible approved it. "Paul did not ask Philemon to set Onesimus free, did he?" But we know now that they were wrong; and all the time, in the social order round about them and in their family life, they were suffering from the effects of human bondage and storing up evil, resentment and intolerable social wrongs for years to come. The consequences of sin go on until a man becomes sensitive to his sin, repents, makes restitution and chooses a way more in conformity with the will of God.

I have chosen slavery as an illustration because it has become a dead issue and can be looked at objectively. But right now we are in the fiery furnace of other sins. We feel the stings of retribution but are only gradually awakening to the fact that things which cause us so great misery, like war and other social evils, do so because they are the outstanding sins of the human race today. And here, as on Calvary, the innocent suffer with and often for the guilty. This makes

the cross our great warning signal that something is wrong with the world and man needs to be reconciled to God.

We are in a very interesting and creative epoch in the history of morals. A new code is emerging, or perhaps not so much a new code as a code on a new basis. The old external codes, supposed to be imposed upon us by arbitrary divine fiat from without, are losing their prestige. But a new code, often not so different from the old ones in content, is arising on the new and self-contained authority of harmony with the inner realities of the universe.

Is any given thing right or wrong? We ask, first: What does an enlightened and informed conscience say about it? But we cannot stop there. We ask, second: What is its survival value? Does it build life or destroy it? Does it secure more cooperative living on a higher level or does it block cooperation? And we go on and ask, thirdly: Does it stand the test of time? What will ten years, a lifetime, a century, say about it? What have past ages learned about it? Has humanity confronted this problem before, and with what result?

Judged by these tests we know as definitely as though our standards had been miraculously written on golden tablets that slavery is wrong, that polygamy is wrong, that adultery is wrong, that oppression of one nation, race or class by another nation, race or class is wrong, that exploitation of the poor is wrong, that sweat-shops, tenements and rural slums are all wrong—sins before God which are sure to entail tragic and disastrous consequences. On the other hand, the experience of humanity in home and school and innumerable intimate personal relationships testifies that truth is the cement in the mortar that holds the brick-wall of society together. When men no longer trust each other they

cease to cooperate effectively and social progress stops. Beyond truth, we know that patience, good will, forgiveness are essential elements in the mortar that holds the wall together. Without these things no family scores very great success, no community really prospers. For the highest kind of achievement there must be devotion, solidarity, self-sacrifice, heroism, love. Where these things crown the spirit of a social group it can achieve great heights, it becomes a "beloved community," such as was the early church that survived in spite of persecution and lived to conquer pagan Rome.

Let no one say: "I don't know what to believe. There aren't any authoritative codes to go by any more. The world is all in a mess and I am so muddled I just don't try to live up to any particular moral standards." That is a pathetic, unnecessary and sometimes insincere moral defeatism. The moral law is still here just as it was in our fathers' or grandfathers' day, just as it was in the time of the Puritans, just as it was when the Sermon on the Mount was spoken or the Ten Commandments first written down. Only today's version of it is based on living contemporary reality written in the facts of life all about us. Truth, honor, justice, good will, patience, forgiveness, self-sacrifice, courage, humility, kindness, devotion, cooperation, love—these things are true and right, not because somebody said so but because the universe says so, God says so! You try to live without them at your loss and peril. Live with and by them and your adventure of faith will justify itself as the latent nobility within your soul responds to the nobility of God. There is a clarion call today for men to stop whining about the breakdown of authority and go out into the world proclaiming the deep and immediate moral authority which

inheres in the tried and tested truths of the universe, the experience of the race and the facts of life. It is not more moral authority that we need.

Knowledge we ask not—knowledge thou hast lent,
But Lord, the will—there lies our bitter need,
Give us to build above the deep intent
The deed, the deed! ⁶

CHAPTER X

RELIGION IN PERSONAL DAILY LIFE

"Religion is the first thing and the last thing, and until a man has found God, and been found by God, he begins at no beginning, he works to no end." These are not the words of a pious religionist. No preacher, no bishop, no evangelist, not even a theological professor, wrote them. But they are true, and all the more impressive because they came hot from the heart of an outstanding novelist amid the pressure of World War I, that rather secular-minded analyst of human life and its problems, H. G. Wells.¹

The trouble with most of us is that religion touches our lives so casually and at such unrelated places. To many a man religion is mostly what he learned in childhood, but it is very slightly connected up with his adult activities. He may, even as a grown man, say a prayer at night before he goes to sleep, but often it is just a childhood prayer—"Now I lay me down to sleep." It is a beautiful prayer—but it does not sound the depths of what prayer may mean to one who has grown up religiously as well as physically.

Or life may be compartmentalized with religion allowed or expected to enter into only one or two compartments. Religion is for Sunday, but is left behind in the closet with one's Sunday clothes on week days; or religion is good for women and children, but, of course, grown men in the rough and tumble of life must live by a sterner code. (I have just heard a voice over the radio proclaiming to a group of Canadian business men: "After the war is over there will

no longer be any sentiment in international economic affairs.") Or else religion is recognized as having to do with death and immortality but is brusquely advised to keep out of politics and let business and social problems strictly alone.

I once heard Professor Arthur E. Holt comment on the difference in the recording of the titles to his father's and his grandfather's farms. The earliest legal description of his grandfather's farm in New England located it, let us say, as beginning at the covered bridge over Stony Creek, then the line followed the creek to the big granite rock two hundred rods upstream, then in a straight line to the large elm tree at the upper end of the pasture, then down a stone wall to the Boston turnpike and thence back along the road to the point of beginning. The references and landmarks were all very personal and local. But not so the deed to his father's farm on the plains in Colorado. It began at a point determined by a base-line which in turn was related to a meridian of latitude. This farm was located not by local landmarks but by its setting in the universe! Religion today, to be really significant and effective, must relate a man's life, all of it and all the time, not to limited and local landmarks but to the sweep and meaning of the universe. God is not just a Sunday God, not just a kind of idol or fetish kept in churches and needing to be flattered and cajoled by ritual or certain ethical taboos. God is the God of the universe; all of life is his concern and can only come to harmonious fulfillment as it is completely adjusted to his laws.

✓ For convenience of discussion, let us take up man's personal religious life from three sides, ethical, mystical and institutional; remembering, however, that it is always the same man and the same religion we are discussing. Harry Emerson Fosdick once observed that a man is like an island in that sometimes you have to go all the way around to find

a place to land. Let us begin with the ethical side and see if we can land there.

"To thine own self be true" is the first law of ethics but the second is like unto it—"thou canst not then be false to any man." ² Religion's contribution to ethics is to insist that the moral boundary lines of life must be oriented not by the covered bridge of prejudice or large elm tree of tradition at the corner of the local pasture, not even by any legal stone-wall code no matter how venerable, but by a base-line related to the universe, by our best, completest and most adequate knowledge of the will of God.

Since this was discussed in the last chapter, let us take it for granted and drive on to the two aspects of ethics with which we all have to deal—personal and social.

Personal ethics are pretty well blocked out. They are like an old settled country where everyone knows the main traveled roads, and where there are hotels and service stations every few miles and the roads are paved, policed and so well marked that no one need get lost. We all know what to expect and require of ourselves as Christians in personal life. Robert Louis Stevenson summed it up very beautifully in those words which you can find just below the little bronze ship erected in his honor in Portsmouth Square in San Francisco: "To be honest; to be kind; to earn a little; to spend a little less; to renounce when that shall be necessary but this without bitterness; to keep a few friends, but these without capitulations; above all on the same grim terms to keep friends with one's self—here is a task for all that a man has of fortitude and of delicacy."

In personal relationships, the Christian man will not only play the game according to the rules but he will play it generously. He will live and let live. He will not remove his neighbor's landmark. He will not demand his pound of

flesh. Not only will he observe the traffic laws, he will also stop to help a fellow-motorist change a tire or tow his car to a service station. He believes in the parable of the Good Samaritan and, without being imposed upon and made a fool of, tries to live up to it. He meets ill-will, discourtesy and misunderstanding and even injury and malice with no surly oath, no grim revenge, but with patience and forgiveness, cherishing no animosities and hatreds. He believes in the gospel of the second mile and is convinced that the Sermon on the Mount contains the only finally successful code for personal relationships, hard as it sometimes is really to live up to this conviction. He measures life by the golden rule.

All this, while not easy, is not impossible. The roads are so well marked and policed, and the courtesies of the road so generally understood that a man need not have a collision if he is a reasonably careful and considerate driver. So far as personal ethics are concerned, we live in a fairly civilized community. The Ten Commandments have done their work well. We do not kill, steal or run away with our neighbor's wife—nor get drunk and beat up our own. We may covet a good deal, and we may have lost out on Sabbath keeping, but we do try not to bear false witness and we think we do not worship idols—though we do. We tolerate our fathers and mothers, even though they may be a little oldfashioned. The ethical problems of this age are not primarily in the personal field—though there is yet a good deal of rocky and unplowed land even here.

It is when we get out into the area of social ethics that the landscape changes and the problems become really difficult. "What the Social Classes Owe One Another" was the title of a book some years ago by a famous economist. "Not much," is the answer very largely given in deeds, if not in

words, today. Has the millionaire on the Gold Coast any responsibility for the city slum or doesn't the parable of the Good Samaritan cross the boundaries between rich and poor, especially if they come of different races and cultural backgrounds? If the Negro should be "kept in his place," what is that place and why should it be hedged about by limitations, hardships and discriminations no white man would willingly accept for himself? Has the Golden Rule gone on a holiday when labor relations or the race problem have to be evaluated? If there are "good" Jews and "bad" Jews, are there not also good and bad Gentiles? Why not draw a horizontal line of good or bad behavior across both races rather than a vertical line between them? If Americans of Japanese ancestry are as entitled to their rights under the Constitution and are as loyal, thrifty and law-abiding as, say, Americans of German ancestry, why are they treated less fairly and considerately? Does a man have to go out and kill other men at the command of his government, or is there a respectable and recognized place in the social order for the conscientious objector to war?

These are some of the rugged foot-hills of ethical debate that you get into when you leave the settled country of personal morals and begin to pioneer your way out into the jagged mountainous terrain of social ethics. Very few good surveys have been run here, trusted and generally accepted maps are rare and most of the roads are yet to be constructed.

The most terrific obstacle in this far country of social morality is the terrible desert of international affairs where the human race has been wandering for forty years. Now the conviction which religion has to contribute at this juncture is that the desert and mountains are just as much a part of the world as the settled country and that the same meridi-

ans and base-lines exist here and must be used as the basis of our surveys if we are ever to find our true directions.

To the Christian, the wild savage tribes which harass us in these desert places are human, like ourselves. They can best be dealt with, not by retaliation, oppression, violence and hatred, but by fair play, an equal sharing of economic opportunity and a never-failing spirit of helpfulness, good will and human affection. They look upon us, also, as marauders and oppressors, only somewhat more fortunate and well equipped, and they desire, naturally enough, aggressively to take away from us things we once took by past aggressions of our own—which we have conveniently forgotten. Perhaps, if we were as conscious of our own social sins, past and present, as we are of theirs and made humble and honest confession of them, then (some of us at least believe) we could abandon our deadly feuds, jointly reorganize the whole area, establish reclamation projects for the benefit of all and make the desert blossom like the rose.

But let us go on around the island to the mystical side of personal religion. By mystical I do not mean occult or fantastic. I simply mean that there is an inner spiritual communion between man's spirit and the great Over-soul which we call God that can bring peace and power into our lives, no matter how hard and dangerous the outer world may be. A Christian is something more than a man who is ethically sensitive and straight—he must also be spiritually responsive and related. It's a tough and wicked world we live in, but there are inner resources of poise and spiritual renewal that can help us in our darkest hours.

The first step in personal mystical religion is to recognize the immediate presence of God round about us. No far-off God in either space or time can help us much. We need to say, in the language of the Bible: "The eternal God

is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms." We need to remember that our lives are not alone, isolated and forgotten, but that they are "hid, with Christ, in God." ³

If any man would know this comforting and strengthening inner peace of God which passeth understanding, let him, first of all, commit himself on the moral level to the Christian ethical decision; and then, with body and mind as quiet and composed as possible, let him believe and affirm in his own heart something like this:

I am in the presence of God. His laws govern the universe about me. In his wisdom he has created it all. And I also am his child. I belong to him. His will for me is inward peace and quiet. He wants to help me organize my life around eternal values; and, as I do, he will enter in and dwell with me. There is no problem I cannot solve, or be content to leave unsolved, no pain I cannot overcome, or at least endure, if I rest quietly in him. There is nothing in all the world of which I need to be afraid, if I meet it in his presence. In every emergency there is help for me from God.

In this spirit a man can go out into the world and find it quite transfigured. The beauty of nature, the laughter of little children, the humble and unnoticed impulses of kindness and good will which he finds in ordinary unspoiled people, the miracles of science and the unquenchable search for the ideal in human nature will all say something reassuring to his soul and remind him that God is here at work in his universe.

With such an attitude toward God, prayer becomes a sort of over-tone to all of one's thinking. It is not a life-preserver to be used only when the ship is sinking, something abnormal and rather uncomfortable; it should rather be the natural garment of our daily life. In all life situations

it may gradually become one's habit to stop and meditate about God. "What would be the will of God just here? What would be the Christlike thing to do?" It is a severe practice but it makes prayer real. Prayer is not continually besieging God with requests for special favors, it is communion with him—not just placid communion in a vacuum of pious emotion but soul-stirring communion over things that really matter. Henry Nelson Wieman has said that "God is always in the concrete situation." And the more concrete and difficult the situation, the more likely you are to find God there, if you pray.

There is no good reason why a good Christian should not be both a nature-mystic and a Christ-mystic. Jesus himself was clearly a nature-mystic, as is revealed in his attitude toward birds and flowers and the silence of the hills in the early dawn. He took his supreme decision out of the city street into the quiet of the trees in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was not out of keeping for him to say: "I am the vine, ye are the branches."

To be a Christ-mystic is simply to recognize in Jesus God's supreme revelation in terms of human life. Christ then becomes the constant companion of one's thought, the norm by which values can be measured, the background of reference against which all important decisions are to be made. This takes out of life a great deal of loneliness and uncertainty. With Christ aboard, a man has the sense of a great pilot on his ship, one who knows the course, can read the compass aright and has sailed through stormy seas. Even so cool and critical a person as Matthew Arnold recognized this: ⁴

'Twas August, and the fierce sun overhead
Smote on the squalid squares of Bethnal Green,
And the pale weaver, through his window seen

In Spital-fields, looked thrice dispirited.
I met a preacher there I knew, and said,
"Ill and o'er-worked, how fare you in this scene?"
"Bravely!" said he, "for I of late have been
Much cheered with thoughts of Christ, the living bread."
Oh human soul! so long as thou can'st so
Set up a mark of everlasting light
Above the howling senses' ebb and flow
To cheer thee, and to right thee if thou roam,
Not with lost toil thou laborest through the night!
Thou mak'st the heaven thou hop'st indeed thy home.

The island of personal religion has a third side on which we must land. It is the institutional side, the church. There is a church-mysticism, too. In spite of all its human sins and sorrows there is something divine about the church. No man is a Christian all alone. In some way he feels his kinship with other believers, he belongs to "the beloved community," he is a member of the church invisible which includes all Christ-dedicated souls in every age and race and country, the *Una Sancta* of the ages, the One Holy Universal Church.

Belonging to this mystical invisible church, a man will naturally want to incarnate it in the actual church around the corner where he may go and share in Christian fellowship and cooperate in the great task of bringing the gospel nearer to the world in which he lives. I read recently the biography of a really great man. His life was given in meticulous detail, but there was no mention of church membership nor any hint that he ever attended service. Yet that man came of a godly ancestry, he inherited a tradition of Christian morals and personal nobility that shone through his deeds and utterances—but always in secular language. One gathers that he must have been, theologically, an agnostic.

But when it came to marriage, Phillips Brooks married him; when he arranged for his father's funeral, it was in King's Chapel; when he himself died, he was buried from a church.⁵

We need the church at least at that minimum. But think what would happen to the cause of religion if all men took this detached attitude. D. Elton Trueblood, the chaplain of Stanford University, in a recent book pleads "the necessity of a redemptive society." That redemptive society within the larger social order, acting as the conscience of mankind, must be the church. Dr. Trueblood says: "Many of those who believe most strongly that there is no redemption of civilization apart from religion are not in the church, with consequent loss both to themselves and to the organized religious forces." By way of illustration he then quotes these impressive words from Walter Lippmann, showing how tyranny finds its mortal enemy in religion:

By the religious experience the humblest communicant is led into the presence of a power so much greater than his (tyrannical) master's that the distinctions of this world are of little importance. So it is no accident that the only open challenge to the totalitarian state has come from men of deep religious faith. For in their faith they are vindicated as immortal souls, and from this enhancement of their dignity they find the reason why they must offer a perpetual challenge to the dominion of men over men.⁶

Even more impressive is his quotation in another chapter of this great saying by Lewis Mumford:

A church that taught one part of mankind to walk upright and unafraid through one Dark Age may yet summon up the power that will enable us to avert another Dark Age or to face it, if it begins to descend upon us, with unyielding courage.⁷

Dr. Trueblood, himself, sums up the cause of the church and the reason why good men should join it when he says:

Without (the church) we might long ago have been submerged. If our civilization is to be saved, we must have it or something like it, for man is the kind of creature who needs it. The rock on which the church is built often appears to be weather-beaten rubble, because it is all mixed up with human frailty, but the lesson of history is a continual verification of the judgment that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.⁸

Personal religion may begin with what a man does with his solitariness, with his intensely personal ethical decisions and his inner mystical commitments and assurances, but it is incomplete until he has linked it with like aspirations in other souls through the blessed fellowship of the church.

Personal religion and churchly religion meet and become one in the sacraments. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are intensely personal, but at the same time they are mediated by the church and bear witness to our fellowship with our fellow-believers. Of course, there are many sacramental experiences in life. Wherever a man finds God and is found by God, there, in the deepest sense of the word, a sacrament has taken place. The sacrament is not the outward event but the inner experience, not the stage or its setting but the soul's deep drama on whatever stage. The essence of sacrament is communion with God. If that takes place, there has been a true sacrament. If that does not occur, no external action or traditional ritual can be substituted for it.

But, in order to help people invite God's presence, the church customarily observes two rites, ordinarily called sacraments, in the hope that they may prove channels of divine grace. One is Baptism, by which we dedicate our chil-

dren, or ourselves, to the Lord; and the other is the Lord's Supper, by which we remember Jesus Christ in his loving comradeship with men and his utter self-dedication even unto death. It is well that we have such a simple outward rite of remembrance by which we bridge the centuries and sit in the upper room with Jesus and the twelve. We need to listen to him, to commune with him, to dedicate ourselves to obeying him, and to wait in silence for the touch of his spirit on our bruised and troubled souls. To those who learn to accept the ritual act as a symbol with meanings too deep for words, the Lord's Supper becomes indeed the supreme sacrament. It is a eucharist, which means a holy thanksgiving. It is a communion, which means a binding together into one bundle of the soul with God and Christ and fellow-Christians of every age and race and creed. It is a sacrament, a sacred rite by which worshippers dedicate their souls anew to God and realize once more that the eternal God is their refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms. And, having found God in this sacrament, they become more sensitive to his presence in many other sacramental moments and learn that every common bush may be aflame with God.

CHAPTER XI

A PHILOSOPHY OF DEATH AND IMMORTALITY

Death is a subject that cannot be avoided these days. Ordinarily many people, perhaps most people, put it as far away as possible. "It is inevitable, but there isn't anything you can do about it—so why worry?" is about as much as the current popular philosophy of death has to say. But such a negative and colorless conclusion leaves an aching void in the human heart which the seven devils of depression, melancholy, pessimism, fear, superstition, spiritism, and commercial exploitation rush in to occupy.

Death is more vivid and challenging to us today because of the millions who have faced it in terrible and unexpected forms and because of hundreds of thousands who have died on the field of battle, in the sky or under the sea, and the hundreds of thousands more (though this is never said out loud) who can never quite forget that they have actually killed their fellow men. Surely this age had better take a square look at death and know what it thinks of this spectre of the ages, which, as Tennyson said, "Keeps the keys of all the creeds."¹ Our generation, as it passes in review this modern age, must pause with remorse and searching of heart as it realizes that, while we have saved and prolonged millions of lives by our modern discoveries in medical science, we have at the same time killed millions of others who might have been saved. We have done this through other forms of applied science, released by our greed, our hard-hearted

imperialism, our stubborn self-will, our sluggish imaginations, which seem unable to understand the feelings of other people or forecast the real nature and ghastly facts of war. And now, as a dramatic climax and awful prediction of future possibilities of slaughter, comes the atomic bomb. Perhaps it's time this generation faced up to death!

There seems to be a natural cycle of human existence by which we begin life in the helplessness of babyhood, pass through the exuberant, energetic growth of childhood and youth and come at last to the long productive years of maturity. Then gradually old age creeps upon us, we reap where we have sown, a sense of life's spiritual beauty somehow akin to colors in the sunset or the glory of autumn foliage manifests itself, a larger patience and serener faith arrive, and at last, with the bodily machine worn out and running down, we fall asleep in death. As Henley put it:

My wages taken and the long day done,
In my heart some late lark singing,
The sun-down splendid and serene.²

But death does not always come to people in this normal, God-intended way. To some it comes with an increasing bitterness of spirit. The defeats and disappointments of life, combined with a lack of adequate religious faith, have soured the disposition and made old age a time of acidulous hostility or querulous complaining. Or else old age never comes at all, but life is cut off in youth or in maturity by accident, disease or war. It is in these things—accident, disease and war, plus perversions of the moral ideal—that we find the real and partly inexplicable tragedy of life.

But these things have already been dealt with, and this chapter is reserved for a consideration of the meaning of death at its best—for even death has a best. What does death mean when it comes as the last word in a natural process of

maturity, even as a welcome visitor when the sands of vitality run low? Has man any other life to which he may look forward?

In answering this question a lot depends upon the background of a man's thinking and experience. Some years ago a theological student came before a church council applying for ordination. The "acids of modernity," as Walter Lippmann calls them, had, in his case, eaten away many of the ordinary and accepted forms of Christian faith and expression. His attitudes toward the Bible seemed lacking in warm appreciation, his concepts of Christ were largely critical and even his faith in God somewhat nebulous. Probably there was more of faith in his soul than the examination revealed. The questioning itself at such a time is usually too negative, concentrating not on the candidate's areas of spiritual strength but on his weaknesses. But when it came to immortality this young man, and he was fairly young, said frankly, almost belligerently, that he didn't believe in it. As we left the church for a stroll outside, a wise and mature friend said to me: "The trouble with X—— is not that he doesn't believe in immortality. We could overlook that because of his youth and his entanglement with all the complexities of modern thought. But what troubles me is that he seems to have so little hold on the things in life and Christian experience out of which a faith in immortality conceivably might grow." Well, we ordained him and he has made good as a minister. He did have stalwart basic qualities of honesty, courage and spiritual purpose. Life and marriage and pastoral experience have supplemented and balanced up his religious message and I have never regretted his ordination.

But I have often meditated on my friend's remark: "The things in life and Christian experience out of which a faith in immortality conceivably might grow." What are they?

First, and obviously, tradition. We have all grown up in the rather naïve and unexamined assumption that, after the death of the body, the soul takes its flight to heaven where it enters upon a glorious care-free existence in the city of God. There we shall meet our friends and dear ones, renew old acquaintances, receive rewards for earthly virtues, compensation for earthly sorrow and light on the unsolved problems of this life. Just how we can meet both our great-grandfathers and our great-grandchildren who never co-existed here on earth and at what stage of maturity they all exist in heaven was a problem never faced. Perhaps, after all, it is part of the greater mystery of time and space about the true nature of which we know very little anyway. Nor does this view of heaven leave room for progress or contain much that seems positively and constructively exciting and appealing. In any case, the best and most mature Christian thought has always treated this view of the after-life with reticence, recognizing it as a pictorial and symbolic attempt to affirm the great reality that death does not end all and that there must be a day beyond tomorrow for human values and human personality.

This traditional conception of immortality has been hard hit by the widespread popular acceptance of a purely mechanistic materialism. Many people with a fair knowledge of scientific facts and achievements, and no counter-balancing training in either philosophy or theology, jump to conclusions about like this: "Science is based on a universe composed of matter and energy. When matter and energy are combined in the human body we have certain results. 'The brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile.' There is a considerable element of phosphorus in the brain structure, hence the picturesque statement, 'No thought without phosphorus,' which simply means that consciousness and con-

science, intelligence, idealism, love, hope, faith are absolutely dependent on the physical structure of the brain. When the arteries there begin to harden, thought is correspondingly slowed down. When the brain dissolves, the personality dissolves with it. There is no soul, no spiritual entity, and life is ended when the body is ended."

Now the preservation of any faith in immortality for modern men depends upon exposing and refuting the crudity and philosophical incredibility of this mechanistic materialism which is, in its way, just as naïve and impossible as the rather childish, semi-materialistic, traditional conception of heaven which it so often replaces. Over against it, thoughtful men must always keep in mind considerations like these:

1. No sound thinking about the cosmic order can ever consent to the idea that the universe or the human body is composed solely of matter and energy or just of matter in motion. That assumption is utterly inadequate. Matter itself may be only a sort of crystallized form of energy, but energy is never just physical, as the materialistic formula assumes. Within energy as it produces a universe, or a body, is order, intelligent organization, preparation for processes and events yet to come, purpose, moral standards, esthetic values, consciousness, personality. These are real things. They exist. We know them more indubitably than we know anything material and they cannot be analyzed in any test-tube or weighed on any scales. But they must exist antecedent to both scales and test-tube.

2. While it is true that, as age hardens the arteries, certain thought processes encounter difficulty, that does not at all necessarily mean that the personality is thereby proportionately diminished or destroyed. Indeed, the feeling is quite the other way. Any man over sixty probably experiences at times a baffling decline in his power to remember

names, especially when he is tired. But, given a few minutes for the subconscious to work on the problem, the name bobs up into consciousness. But the man himself feels no diminution of his personality. He is the same unified being as before. He simply experiences trouble operating the machine—as if the tappets in his automobile engine needed cleaning or adjusting. The net result is to make him not doubtful of immortality but more convinced of a certain separateness from and superiority to the body. He views his body with an almost humorous detachment. "It's getting a little the worse for wear, poor thing, but after all I owe it a good deal and love it still!" he says.

3. Putting it more positively, the faith in immortality grows out of one's conception of the nature of human personality. If the human soul, which is made up of consciousness, mind, intelligence, moral sensitivity, esthetic feeling, creative power and imagination, memory and love, is not just a more or less incidental by-product of physical activity, if these things belong to a non-physical sphere of reality, then a faith in their continued existence apart from the bodily processes is reasonable. In Chapter II we tried to present the wonder of human personality as a basic fact in the universe. Little needs to be added here except to point out that personality seems to be equipped with some things, especially in the area of the subconscious, which point in the direction of a continuing existence. The very fact that our minds are much larger and richer in content and capacity than we are consciously aware of at any one time is both interesting and hopeful. It is very arresting suddenly to realize the mental activities which go on quite apart from our waking consciousness. Here in the subliminal areas of the mind we find a marvelous sense of time, an apparently clearer apprehension of logical processes and a capacity to keep

working away toward a solution of the problems which have baffled us. There is also a marvelous store of memory here which is ordinarily untapped and beyond the normal waking personality but which, under hypnosis or careful associational analysis, can be brought into play. Many of the mental snarls and inhibitions, and doubtless much of the courage and intelligence with which men meet life, are, as psychiatrists well know, subconscious phenomena. All these things, so far as they enlarge and dignify the personality, help one to believe in its survival. Like the feet and hands which in due time develop in the unborn babe, they are prophetic of a coming day when they will be useful.

4. There is an area beyond this, an area still too largely unexplored by careful conservative psychologists, which has elements in it that may affect our belief in the survival of personality. I refer, of course, to what are ordinarily lumped together as abnormal psychic phenomena. Some psychologists of good standing believe that they have established scientifically credible instances of thought transference or mind-reading. This, of course, would be of tremendous importance as enlarging the scope of the mind as a non-physical, independent entity. And, in spite of all the fraud and charlatantry with which they are associated, it is quite possible that spiritualistic phenomena will yet yield facts about the nature of personality which will be convincing. At the heart of so much smoke there must be some smoldering coals of reality! This is an area so exploited by tricksters, and in which bereaved and questing people are so exposed to having their deepest emotional needs preyed upon for gain, that one hesitates to hint even this much by way of interest and possible value. But it must be catalogued and reserved for further study and investigation by competent, cool-headed, scholarly research. A dogmatic preju-

dice which throws all psychic phenomena out of the window without careful, searching investigation is quite unscientific.

5. A very different and, to many minds, much more conclusive argument for personal survival is to be found in moral considerations. Human life is characterized by a deeply implanted and apparently very necessary sense of the importance of moral values. The individual human being is endowed with a deep sense of justice without which any worthwhile social order could hardly exist. When political leaders have to enlist popular support for a great war, no matter how questionable and dubious may have been the historic reasons that brought on the conflict, it has to be presented as being fought in behalf of justice. We demand justice for ourselves from the community and from life. To be rudely and abruptly informed that no justice is intended would be a cynic's sneer that would undermine all morale. But, if this is so between us humans, how about our relationship with God? Is it not a sound conviction in the Bible: "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"³ And yet how many lives fail of justice in the earthly span of their existence! Think of the innocent children, alone, who have fallen victims to this terrible war through which we have been passing—what chance did they ever have? Was justice done to them? If God cares for justice to the individual soul, surely there must be a day beyond tomorrow when these victims of war, and their fellow-victims of injustice in times of peace, shall be vindicated. From the days of Job down to our own best thought, a cry goes up to God for justice. If we cannot believe in the ultimate justice of God, what becomes of human justice and all the social order that is founded on it? Nothing is left but a suicidal cynicism on which nothing of value can be built.

Moreover, this applies to all the system of values which

humanity has cherished. Slowly the planet goes its way along the path of physical destiny. So far as we can see, that destiny seems to be an ultimate cooling down until human life is no longer possible upon the earth. Was all this human drama, this agony and aspiration, meaningless and vain? May some similar drama, coming at last to utter nothingness, have been played upon the moon, now so cold and uninhabitable? These are not cheerful thoughts, but they must be faced unless we believe that moral values have meaning also for God and that he will not leave them, or us, in the dust of cynical careless disregard.

6. This leads to what is probably the supreme and only all-sufficient reason for believing in immortality and that is the character of God. If we believe, as I feel we must, that there is a God at the central heart of things, and if we believe that God has revealed himself in manifold ways, some of which this book has sought to indicate, then we can trust such a God to care for us and not leave us to a broken and unjust fate. Then we can commit our ways unto God as Job did:

"But as for me I know that my Redeemer liveth,
And at last he will stand up upon the earth:
And after my skin, even this body, is destroyed,
Then without my flesh I shall see God;
Whom I, even I, shall see at my side
And mine eyes shall behold, and not as a stranger."

.....
"He knoweth the way that I take;
When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." ⁴

7. In view of all this it is not surprising that there is a well-nigh universal outreach of the human soul toward immortality. There is something about us that resents death ter-

ribly—not so much for ourselves as for others. We can adjust our minds to our own cessation of existence but we cannot accept it so easily for our friends or for the great and good. How often we have looked upon the quiet face of someone we have known and loved, with the relaxation and peace of death upon it bringing out all its spiritual beauty, and then have turned aside saying to ourselves: “No, he is not there. That is only the dwelling in which he lived, all strangely quiet now, but that is not the real person whom I loved. He has gone! Where? Oh, that I knew where I might find him!” These troubled human souls of ours have an intense longing for a continued communion with those we love. Let’s not worry about whether we could know both our great-grandfathers and our great-grandchildren at the same time. Perhaps space and time are like a curving river, as someone has suggested, where the steamers cannot see each other around the bends in the stream but where an aviator flying overhead can see both at the same time. Set free from physical limitations of the body, may we not attain new dimensions of spiritual comprehension by which time and space may be transcended? But, in the meantime, this resentment against death and this longing for assurance of immortality stand as significant human facts. Have these things arisen just out of wishful thinking? Or may it not be more reasonable, in view of all the other considerations we have been looking at, to trust that this longing is an out-thrust toward reality, “deep calling unto deep.” It is a thrilling story of how the unseen planet Pluto was discovered just because its presence disturbed the ordinary calculations of astronomers. “There must be another planet there, previously unknown,” they said. And so the human soul is ever reaching out toward this unknown, and will not be content to accept death as the end.

8. And then, after all and as in so many other cases, we turn to Jesus. He saw life with an insight we have learned to trust. Wherever we are able to check on his conclusions, we find him right. He is the Master of our lives, and in him we have found the Light which shineth in the darkness and has never been put out. How did he feel about death and immortality? There is no question as to his profound conviction of the eternal life. After all is said and done, all the arguments in, all the evidence weighed, we had best at last join our convictions with those of the early church that "this mortal must put on immortality" and that our Savior Jesus Christ "hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." Then, whether we live or die, we can say with Jesus: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Such a faith will have certain practical results. For one thing, as Douglas Steere has pointed out, death then illuminates life, points up its values and gives nobility and meaning to its sufferings and struggles.⁵ Death measures life not just by transitory yard-sticks but by eternal values and goals which glow with a light that comes from beyond this world's horizon.

And another practical result ought to be a quite radical transformation of funeral services. They ought not to be saturated with gloom but suffused by a holy light of faith. Light and not darkness should characterize them. Perhaps, as time goes on, they will take on more the character of memorial services where the accent will be not on the dead body but on the living and translated soul. This would be helped if cremation, private and accompanied by a simple service of scripture and prayer, came first. Then, with or without the presence of the urn surrounded by a simple wreath of flowers and no other floral display, a few simple

words of affectionate regard and high faith in the larger life of the spirit could be spoken by a minister or friend, prayer made, the scripture read and a benediction pronounced:

And now may the God of Peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, make you perfect in every good work to do his will; working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen." ⁶

A very wise and helpful thought about funerals is contained in these words of Allen H. Gates in which he goes back to Jesus for the pattern of a truly Christian funeral and adjustment to the changed relations which death inevitably brings.⁷

The Master's funeral was perfect. It was so simple. There was no elaborate preparation of the body. It was simply wrapped in clean cloths and laid quietly to rest.

It was so private. Just intimate friends and immediate relatives were present. It was respectful, too, thoroughly in keeping with the Master's whole teaching. What became of the body was of secondary and minor importance.

When the women, doubtless feeling it disrespectful to lay a body away without anointing it with the customary embalming spices, came immediately after the Sabbath to perform this rite, they found nothing to do. They were asked, "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here."

Following this we read of many small group meetings where His acts and teachings were brought to mind. Was that not far more fitting than to have Peter pronounce a lengthy eulogy over the lifeless, spiritless body of his Lord and Teacher? These gatherings of intimate friends, according to their report, made them feel their Friend's spirit was actually with them; their recollections were so vivid.

Keeping alive his memory was secondary to preserving within

their hearts the Eternal Truth which he temporarily reflected by his life. That is the only excuse for keeping any individual's memory alive—that others may see, as in a glass darkly, some portion of the White Light ineffable. The most fallible of mortals reflects, as a prism, some of God's holiness. Is there a mortal being of whom someone may not say, "With all his faults, he was good at heart"?

It is the minister's responsibility to see that the frail sparks of such insights light on responsive hearts and are quickly shared lest the truth be lost.

This is the deathless Holy Thing that must be revered and preserved. God never dresses it up in velvet flummeries. Again and again he reaches down to the humblest and lowliest to prove that human nature in its simplest and least sophisticated forms can incarnate His spirit. He needs not our elaborate ceremonies to aid Him in doing this.

CHAPTER XII

SOME MODERN CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

Where do we arrive after an aeroplane view of the whole landscape of religious thought, such as the preceding chapters have tried to give? Not in some arid desert land, but amid a goodly company of thoughtful Christian men of many different denominations and all the centuries.

For the help of the reader who may now want to get out pen or pencil and try to formulate his own personal creed for daily living, this chapter will be made up of quotations from modern men and women who have set down their basic beliefs not for this book but on widely different occasions. A study of these statements may prove remarkably reassuring and rewarding. They are like voices in a great chorus, each with its own tonal quality but all in essential harmony—a chorus of faith and aspiration. Join this choir invisible which makes undying music in the world by writing out for yourself what you, too, are convinced is of the highest value and head it: *This I, too, believe!*

A SCRIPTURAL CONFESSION OF FAITH

*A modern fabric woven out of the
New Testament language and ideas*

We believe that God is a spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

We believe that God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the whole earth.

We believe that God is love, and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God.

We believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and as many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

We believe that the Lord Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

We believe that if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.

We believe that, if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

We believe that the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but that he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. Amen.

THE FAITH OF DESCENDANTS OF THE PILGRIMS

This statement of faith, adopted at the Kansas City National Council of Congregational Churches in 1916, is widely accepted and used, not as a creedal test but as an irenic constructive interpretation of Christian truth by the churches which have descended from the little band of pilgrim exiles who came to America in the Mayflower in 1620.

We believe in God the Father, infinite in wisdom, goodness, and love; and in Jesus Christ, his Son, our Lord and Saviour, who for us and our salvation lived and died and rose again and liveth evermore; and in the Holy Spirit, who taketh of the things of Christ and revealeth them to us, renewing, comforting, and inspiring the souls of men.

We are united in striving to know the will of God as taught in the Holy Scriptures, and in our purpose to walk in the ways of the Lord, made known or to be made known to us.

We hold it to be the mission of the Church of Christ to

proclaim the gospel to all mankind, exalting the worship of the one true God, and laboring for the progress of knowledge, the promotion of justice, the reign of peace, and the realization of human brotherhood.

Depending, as did our fathers, upon the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth, we work and pray for the transformation of the world into the kingdom of God; and we look with faith for the triumph of righteousness and the life everlasting. Amen.

A GREAT RUSSIAN'S CONFESSION OF FAITH

LEO TOLSTOY

I believe in God, who is for me spirit, love, the principle of all things.

I believe that God is in me, as I am in him.

I believe that the true welfare of man consists in fulfilling the will of God.

I believe that from the fulfillment of the will of God there can follow nothing but that which is good for me and for all men.

I believe that the will of God is that every man should love his fellow-men, and should act towards others as he desires that they should act toward him.

I believe that the reason of life is for each of us simply to grow in love.

I believe that this growth in love will contribute more than any other force to establish the Kingdom of God on earth—

To replace a social life in which division, falsehood and violence are all-powerful, with a new order in which humanity, truth and brotherhood will reign.

I believe that the will of God has never been more clearly, more freely expressed than in the teaching of Jesus.

I believe that this teaching will give welfare to all humanity, save men from destruction, and give this world the greatest happiness.¹

GOD IS IN ALL THAT LIBERATES AND LIFTS

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

God is in all that liberates and lifts;
In all that humbles, sweetens, and consoles.

A mystery of purpose gleaming through the secular confusions of the world.

Whose will we darkly accomplish, doing ours.

Sometimes at waking, in the street sometimes, or on the hillside, always unforewarned,

Man sees a grace of being finer than himself, that beckons and is gone.

O Power, more near my life than life itself,

Or what seems life to us in sense immured,

Even as the roots, shut in the darksome earth, share in the tree-top's joyance, and conceive of sunshine and wide air and winged things, by sympathy of nature,

So do I have evidence of thee so far above, yet in and of me.²

THE FAITH OF CHRIST'S FREEMEN

THOMAS CURTIS CLARK

A greatly beloved American religious poet of today

Our faith is in the Christ who walks
With men today, in street and mart;

The Light of Faith

The Constant Friend who thinks and talks
With those who seek him with the heart.

We would not spurn the ancient lore,
The prophet's word or psalmist's prayer;
But lo! our Leader goes before,
Tomorrow's battles to prepare.

His Gospel calls for living men,
With singing blood and minds alert;
Strong men, who fall to rise again,
Who strive and bleed, with courage girt.

We serve no God whose work is done,
Who rests within his firmament;
Our God, his labors but begun,
Toils evermore, with power unspent.

God was and is and e'er shall be;
Christ lived and loved—and loves us still;
And man goes forward, proud and free,
God's present purpose to fulfill.³

A PHILOSOPHER'S FAITH

PROFESSOR ALFRED C. KNUDSON

Boston University

I believe that the world is not self-existent, that it is not a self-running mechanism.

I believe that the universe has its source in Spirit, and that this Spirit is a personal Being. He is self-conscious and free. He has established the world-order and maintains it.

Only on this assumption can I find meaning in the world, and only on this assumption does existence itself become intelligible. For me personality is the key to reality. There is no other mode of being known to us which combines unity with plurality and identity with change and thus fills out the notion of what is truly real. Only a personal Being can be the unitary and abiding cause of the world. I, therefore, believe in the personality of God.

I believe that the divine motive in the creation of the world must have been love. No other motive would satisfy the demands of our moral nature, and no other motive would be in harmony with the character of God as revealed in Christ. As personality is the key to reality, so I believe Christ is the key to the heart of God. I believe with Him that God is love, and with Paul that all things work together for good to them that love God. This faith, it is true, seems to be contradicted by appearances. But appearances, we know, not only belie faith, they at times belie reality. Things are not as they seem. So despite appearances, I believe that a loving divine purpose lies back of and gives direction to the universe.

I believe in the sacredness and infinite worth of the human soul. I believe that man in his essential nature is a child of God. He was created in the image of God and in his inmost being is akin to God. But he begins his life on a non-moral plane, and the supreme task confronting him in the world is the moralizing of his non-moral impulses and desires. This is an extremely difficult task and one incapable of achievement without the renewing and sanctifying grace of God. As God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, so I believe He is present as the Holy Spirit in the church and in every redemptive agency that is brought to bear upon human life.

I believe that the world as well as the individual is the subject of redemption. I believe it is the divine will not only that the heart of the individual be purified but that the social order be improved. I believe in the Kingdom of God both here and hereafter. I believe the coming of the Kingdom is the gift of God and that it should also be the supreme goal of human striving. I believe in praying each day, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." ⁴

A NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLAR'S FAITH

FREDERICK C. GRANT

Union Theological Seminary, New York

I believe in God, a personal God: not a finite personality, nor just one Person among many, but the personal Being "in whom we live and move and have our being," the One from Whom all personal existence is derived. As personal, we can know, love, and obey Him, for He has not only existence but positive character. And yet we cannot define Him exhaustively, because in Him personality transcends our limited human conceptions by its infinite heights and depths.

God reveals Himself in many ways, in the beauty of nature, in the orderly course of law throughout the universe, in its slow majestic evolution, in the gradual unfolding of the ethical consciousness of man—which is just as truly a response to man's environment as are his intellectual processes: both are a kind of "thinking God's thoughts after Him." He is revealed also in the course of history, and in the great intuitions of prophets and seers, recorded in the sacred literature: above all He is revealed in a quality of life, ethical and spiritual, which certain exalted moral geniuses—

we call them saints—have achieved. And supreme among these, and finally, He is revealed in the life and character, the teaching and example of Jesus our Lord. That spirit which was in Jesus, and dominated His whole life, is the fullest possible revelation, in the terms and under the conditions of human life, of the Eternal God—ininitely wise, loving, and good.

Out of the life and work upon earth by Jesus our Lord came the Christian Church, with its divine teaching, its august yet intimate worship, its fellowship of Christians with Christ and with one another, its sacred books, its sacraments and its whole rich life of devotion and consecration to the will of God. The church is not the Kingdom of God, but only its beginning, in time and upon the level of this earth; and the church's prayer is: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The church is not perfect: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels": it is still frail and human; but the Spirit within it is the Spirit of God himself.

Beginning here, but reaching out beyond the confines of this narrow little world, is the eternal life God lets us share in Christ. It cannot be otherwise! If this life is all, then the best we can know, the highest we can hope for, the dearest things we can love, in this life, end in dust and ashes, and life itself goes down to defeat! But since I believe in the God revealed in Christ, in the loving and merciful, the just and forgiving God, I believe that life goes on beyond the limits of our dim vision, ever richer and more satisfying, in the nearer presence of the One who came and called us unto Himself. It is not just because I think human character and personality so precious a thing—there might be some question about that—but because I believe God's purposes cannot finally fail: that is really why I believe in eternal life.

But it is not merely private and individual salvation—the fulfillment of God's purposes involves the coming of His Kingdom, His reign throughout the universe; and our immortality means our sharing in that Kingdom, when God's will is done perfectly and forever by all who love and adore Him.

The social implications of this creed are obvious, as are also its private and individual applications. So is also its optimism! Despite the discouraging inertia of religious institutionalism, and the backward drag of human habits, God will bring His purposes to pass!⁵

WHAT A NEGRO LEADER SAID

W. E. BURGHARDT DU BOIS

*Perhaps the best known leader of the Negro race
since Booker Washington*

I believe in God who made of one blood all races that dwell on earth. I believe that all men, black and brown and white, are brothers, varying through time and opportunity, in form and gift and feature, but differing in no essential particular, and alike in soul and in the possibility of infinite development.

Especially do I believe in the Negro race; in the beauty of its genius, the sweetness of its soul, and its strength in that meekness which shall yet inherit this turbulent earth.

I believe in pride of race and lineage and self; in pride of self so deep as to scorn injustice to other selves; in pride of lineage so great as to despise no man's father; in pride of race so chivalrous as neither to offer bastardy to the weak nor beg wedlock of the strong, knowing that men may be brothers in Christ, even though they be not brothers-in-law.

I believe in service—humble reverent service, from the blackening of boots to the whitening of souls; for work is heaven, idleness hell, and wage is the “well done!” of the Master who summoned all them that labor and are heavy laden, making no distinction between the black and sweating cotton hands of Georgia and the first families of Virginia, since all distinction not based on deed is devilish and not divine.

I believe in the Devil and his angels, who wantonly work to narrow the opportunity of struggling human beings, especially if they be black; who spit in the faces of the fallen, strike them that cannot strike again, believe the worst and work to prove it, hating the image which their Maker stamped on a brother's soul.

I believe in the Prince of Peace. I believe that war is murder. I believe that armies and navies are at bottom the tinsel and braggadocio of oppression and wrong; and I believe that the wicked conquest of the weaker and darker nations by nations whiter and stronger but foreshadows the death of that strength.

I believe in liberty for all men; the space to stretch their arms and their souls; the right to breathe and the right to vote, the freedom to choose their friends, enjoy the sunshine and ride on the railroads, uncursed by color; thinking, dreaming, working as they will in a Kingdom of God and love.

I believe in the training of children, black even as white; the leading out of little souls into the green pastures and beside the still waters, not for pelf or peace but for life lit by some large vision of beauty and goodness and truth; lest we forget and, like Esau, for mere meat barter their birthright in a mighty nation. Finally, I believe in patience—patience with the weakness of the weak and the strength of the

strong, the prejudice of the ignorant and the ignorance of the blind; patience with the tardy triumph of joy and the mad chastening of sorrow—patience with God.⁶

A WOMAN'S FAITH

GRACE SLOAN OVERTON

A widely known religious counsellor of students

I believe in human nature. Persons with this human nature cradled my childhood. They taught me to see the difference between right and wrong. They exposed me to the contagion of living with the Unseen.

I believe in human nature in the individual person. I have seen its outcomes in those who never had a chance; I have seen it in the highly favored who chose the worst—or the better—and so missed the highest way. But I still have to believe in human nature. I know that in it there wait to be awakened capacities with which we could together create the truly good life.

I believe in God. The sky our human nature charts is never high enough to satisfy us. From our human story of the past the most important volumes are still missing. Our keenest present-day analyses advertise our blind spots. For our human penetration the future must be chiefly haze—unless! Unless there be a Whole. And our grandest human projects are mere jittery starts and stops in a formless pageantry unless there be an Ongoing.

I have to believe in God. And it is easy to believe. For I have sensed in others, and I have felt in myself His comfort-bringing, His power-building presence. Human nature does not struggle alone—there is always God.

I believe in Jesus. In His teachings are the principles for

the best individual living. His words and His life sketch for us also the techniques for such living. But beyond this I believe in Jesus because He gives us the pattern for that best way of life persons can build together. And not the pattern alone; the skills He indicates for human contacts would, if wrought together in a complete working strategy, fill us instantly with the thrill of good social living.

These faiths I hold. They pulsate together in a symphony of assurance.⁷

WHAT A TEACHER OF THE BIBLE BELIEVES

LAURA H. WILD

Professor Emeritus of Bible in Mt. Holyoke College

I believe in a God at least as great as the greatest I know, which is *Mind* and *Love*. God, therefore, to me is Supreme Mind and Love within the Universe.

I believe Jesus was a historic person so filled with God's Spirit that He showed the way to harmony with God more directly and practically than any other religious leader. "Love so amazing" could be no less than divine. I believe His spirit is still present in men's hearts when they practice his Way of Life.

I believe the Jesus Way to harmony with God and therefore to the highest achievement possible to man, is primarily one of attitude. This attitude is theocentric, not egocentric, a complete surrender of selfish desire to God's will. Desire is not to be crushed but directed away from self toward Truth, Love, Beauty, Nobility as characteristics of God. The first commandment is to love such a God with all one's heart and mind and strength. A necessary corollary to such love of God is love of one's fellow man. Love of self must be surrendered to this larger love. Such a commitment is the

primary act rather than good works conceived and carried out by man's initiative and strength. Good works will follow which will then be divinely guided.

I believe the Bible is one of the great religious classics, the supreme classic for Christians because revealing the portrait and teachings of Jesus. It is the record of the evolution of great ethical and religious attitudes practically applied. These truths are expressed in lofty, beautiful language but so simply as to be understood by common men and still effective in their power to search men's hearts and guide their lives.

I believe the church is the vehicle of Christian teaching, an organized framework for conveying the living spirit of Jesus. This framework has varied from time to time through the ages in the attempt to adapt it to changes in surroundings. It is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Honor and loyalty are due it as a historic institution outlasting all opposition because, notwithstanding many weaknesses, it conveys the vital stream of Christian living.

Because personal life is creative, because God is the Source of Creative Power, because at the best we have only begun to explore the fringe of what this Creative Power can achieve, because when man is in touch with God in the least degree he knows himself united to something infinite rather than finite, I believe in immortality.⁸

A CHURCH SOCIAL WORKER'S CREED

G. VANCE MC CAUSLAND

I believe in God and I believe in man.

I believe that man was created in the image of a God of order. He expects man to live an ordered life, and He makes me sensitive to disorder wherever I find it. At times I may

wish to run away from the crowded, disorderly city, with its smoke and noise, and go out into the country where there are fewer people and problems. But I know that I cannot be content in an orderly part of God's world when there are disordered places that need my help.

I believe that God created man for fellowship with Himself. Like our Maker, we are incapable of enjoying life by ourselves. We are concerned about our fellows. So, I cannot relish good food when I know that all people are not adequately fed. I cannot feel secure in my home because all families, through no fault of their own, are not well housed. I cannot enjoy the social life about me when I see that there are barriers of race and class separating man from man.

I believe that man was created in the image of a Father who wants His children to be saved. He sent His Son into the world to save man. "Inasmuch as you did it to the least of these—" is one proof that He would share His saviourhood with all those who would help Him serve mankind. Therefore, I must do everything that I can in behalf of God's other children.

I believe that, if I can understand all this and find in this knowledge the resources to do my social work, I can become the happiest person in the world, because I shall be working with God in the building of a better world.⁹

JAMES HILTON'S CREED

*James Hilton is the author of "Lost Horizon"
and "Good-Bye, Mr. Chips"*

I believe in Truth, the Truth we may never find, but which hopefully, even though it may be hopeless, we must pursue to the end.

I believe in Faith, the frame round the invisible image of Truth.

I believe in Goodness, as a dog believes in a bone—no more arguably, no less eagerly.

I believe in all the possible kinds of love.

I believe that Life is worth living, and that Death is probably worth dying also.

I believe that democracy has fewer absurdities than autocracy, and that the art and craft of living is the discovery of the minimum check needed on personal freedom.

I believe that a whole lifetime is nothing weighed against a moment's lifting of the veil that hides Beauty.

I believe in God—something including yet also beyond the sum total of everything I believe in.¹⁰

A PERSONAL CONFESSION OF FAITH

ALBERT W. PALMER

We live by faith. That is to say we organize our lives around our convictions as to what is true and right and practicable. Faith is not something irrational and illusory. It is not "believin' things you know aint so," as the small boy defined it. Neither is it believing things because they are impossible, as the dogmatist would say. It is "assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen," according to the Bible. But it is not a baseless assurance or an irrational conviction. It is more like the leap which a broad-jumper takes. We run as far and fast as we can along the cinderpath of experience, fact and reason, and then at last, we make the leap of faith—but always in the direction that experience, fact and reason have pointed out the way.

My basic convictions, therefore, are as follows:

I believe in the universe. I rejoice in its beauty and find reassurances in its order as revealed by scientific research. I try to adjust my life to its laws.

I believe in the moral law. At the human level I find that the cosmic order blossoms forth in great moral and spiritual values. I accept them and seek to live in tune with the Infinite.

I believe in human personality, the most immediate and wonderful thing I know. Its consciousness, intelligence, courage, sense of moral values, love of beauty and creative power are fundamental facts of experience. In spite of sin, suffering and evil, human personality is normally good and never quite gives up struggling toward better things.

I believe in God. Such a universe is not an affair of chance. At the heart of it is an intelligent, ever-present, dependable Power. Having produced personality, God cannot Himself be impersonal but, rather, must be super-personal. My hope of immortality is in His integrity and creative love.

I believe in Jesus. As humanity at its noblest, He is also our clearest picture of God. God cannot be less than Jesus. So far as God could reveal Himself in human life, we have that revelation in Christ and the cross.

I believe in the onward surge of humanity, not an inevitable automatic progress but a creative, divinely motivated struggle toward justice, peace, brotherhood, spiritual values and unseen goals of nobler living—the Kingdom of heaven!

Finally I believe in the church as the fellowship of all who love the Lord and seek to build the Kingdom of heaven in the hearts of men and in the life of the world.¹¹

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ALBERT W. PALMER

NOTES AND REFERENCES

INTRODUCTION

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² Cf. Carey McWilliams, *Prejudice: Japanese Americans, Symbols of Racial Intolerance*, published by Little Brown and Company, 1944.

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CHAPTER I

¹ Judges 11:29-40.

² Genesis 22:1-14.

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⁴ Romans 8:28.

⁵ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, V-2.

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⁷ Hebrews 2:10.

⁸ Job 2:10.

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CHAPTER IV

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² Luke 18:10-14.

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- ⁵ Matthew 6:23.
- ⁶ I Corinthians 3:11.
- ⁷ I Corinthians 2:2.
- ⁸ Luke 9:51.
- ⁹ Mark 15:34 and Psalm 22:1-21.
- ¹⁰ I Corinthians 4:12.
- ¹¹ I Peter 2:21-24.

CHAPTER V

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- ³ Mark 6:31-44, 52; John 6:1-14.
- ⁴ John 2:1-11.
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- ⁶ Mark 6:45-51; John 6:16-21.
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